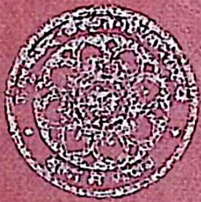
SARASVATĪBHAVANA-STUDIES

[Vol. 31]

THE TRIUNE PATH



A READING OF THE

BHAGAVAD GĪTĀ

By

GAURINATH

Sampurnanand Sanskrit University
VARANASI
1982

AMBIKA DATTA SHARMA

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Published by :
Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya,
Varanasi.

Available at—
Sales Department
Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya,
Varanasi-221002. (India)

First Edition—1100 Copies.
Price : Rs. 17.00

Printed by :
Ghan Shyam Upadhyaya
Manager
Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishvavidyalaya Press
Varanasi.

TO OUR BELOVED MASTER

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TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION

The Sanskrit words have been transliterated following the internationally accepted diacritical marks according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists of Athens in 1912.

VOWELS

1. Simple vowels a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, ṛ, ḷ
2. Diphthongs e, ai, o, au

CONSONANTS

1. Gutturals	ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa
2. Palatals	ca	cha	ja	jha	ña
3. Cerebrals	ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
4. Dentals	ta	tha	da	dha	na
5. Labials	pa	pha	ba	bha	ma
6. Semivowels	ya	ra	la	va	
7. Sibilants	śa	ṣa	sa		
8. Aspirate	ha				
9. Visarga	ḥ				
10. Anusvāra	ṁ				

The vowels *i*, *u*, *ṛ* and *ḷ* are short; *ā*. *ī*, *ū* and the four diphthongs are long. The letter *e* is pronounced as in *bed*; *ai* as in *kite*; *au* as in *count*. The letter *ṅ* has the sound of *ng* in *king*; *c* is pronounced as *ch* in *church*; *j* as *j* in *just*. The cerebrals *ta*, etc., are pronounced with the tongue turned back against the roof of the palate. The letter va is pronounced as *v* in *victory*, the letters *ś* as palatal *s* in *ship*, *ṣ* as *sh* in *should* and s as s in *sun*; visarga *ḥ* as hard *h* followed by a soft echo of the preceding vowel; the nasal *ṁ* as in *some*. All aspirates such as *kha*, *tha*, *pha* etc., are pronounced distinctly.

FOREWORD

I recall with pleasure the early years of my life when I was privileged to listen every night to the chanting of the Bhagavad Gītā by my beloved aunt. She would take care to see that both my pronunciation and my recitation were perfect and she inspired in me a love for the Divine Song, that has been kept alive up to this day. Born and brought up in the atmosphere of a Hindu Brahmin family of the traditional type, I gradually initiated myself into the study of this important text.

In the course of my academic career, I had occasions to teach this text to my students at the Presidency College, Calcutta. When I retired from service in 1970 from Varanasi Sanskrit University, a few persons in Calcutta approached me to read this text with them and to help them in the pursuit of their spiritual and religious life. It was at "Sevāyana" that I could meet my friends every week on Mondays and in course of a decade, we could complete our study. During these long ten years, the reading of the text served to enlighten us on the subtle and profound mystery of the Divine Dialogue. It was during this period that I had an occasion to deliver a course of three lectures on the Gītā at the Indological Institute in Delhi and to inaugurate a seminar on the Bhagavad Gītā organized by the Kurukṣetra University.

In the autumn of 1979, in the holy land of Kurukṣetra, Providence brought me into contact with one who showed a genuine interest for spiritual life and Vedic culture in particular. During the year that followed, we dedicated invaluable moments to a joint study-in-depth of the Poem and, in that connection, I could unfold once again the mystery of the Gītā, as I had felt it in my life. But, this time, the fertile interaction of the methodical inquisitiveness of the West and the serene wisdom of the East brought about a new synthesis to which echo is given in the present book.

Saints and scholars of different ages have recorded their impressions on the Gītā and these documents are irreplaceable treasures for mankind. Mine is a most humble contribution based on the firm conviction that life should be guided by an unflinching trust in God's will and that all of man's actions should spring from an implicit love for the Supreme. In this context, it was a matter of particular satisfaction for me that, at the moment this book was being seen through the press, I was invited to deliver a lecture on a subject of my choice on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Kurukṣetra University. Needless to say that the subject, once again, was the Bhagavad Gītā.

As I am concluding this foreword on the day of Phālgunī-pūrṇimā, I cannot but bow down in awe and wonder to the Supreme Ruler of our lives who, in his unbounded love for this humble servant of his, conceived such an auspicious constellation of events in the autumn of my life.

I shower my blessings on Sri Saligram Yadav, Development Officer and Personal Assistant to Kulapati who has taken great pains to see the book through the press. The University Press and particularly Sri Ghan Shyam Upadhyaya, the Press Manager, have led us in a debt of gratitude. Without their active cooperation, the book would not have come out in such quickness of time.

VARANASI
MARCH 10, 1982

GAURINATH

DEDICATION TO THE READER

The Bhagavad Gītā, the Divine Song of pre-Buddhistic India has often been acclaimed as the greatest philosophic Poem of mankind. For a person born and brought up in a cultural atmosphere in which the Gītā is reflected in practically all facets of life, this affirmation may be evident. Indeed, the Poem is still sung today in temples and hermitages, it is recited in classrooms and it has even been transformed into bed-time tales by loving elders for the young ones. As for the ardent seeker who will spare no effort to dive deep into the text of the Gītā, this statement will hardly sound as an exaggeration. Has it not inspired great sages in their spiritual struggles, over the ages, and fascinated scholars and scientists from the East and the West, while drawing voluminous and detailed commentaries from renowned philosophers in the course of human history ?

Nothing is found wanting about the Bhagavad Gītā and it may be wondered, therefore, whether yet another book should be written, only to add to the already impressive list of works on the subject. The answer to this question is instantaneous, since the elaboration of a book of this nature is not prompted by empirical considerations but is rather the spontaneous expression of an overflow of inner experience. The book has humbly been qualified by the author as a "reading" of the Bhagavad Gītā, in so far as it purports to help the dedicated reader to recognize the Truth of the Poem from several angles of view in order to grasp it in its totality, but, without claiming to give any personal message or any particular philosophic interpretation of the Gītā.

The purpose of studying Scriptures is to feel the inspiration that has given shape to these sublime thoughts and to discover the essence of the texts which may sometimes lie deeply buried under a series of striking and disarming paradoxes. The reader is to translate the Truth of the Scriptures into an original living experience, and this is the reason why one returns time and again to a sacred text whereas one discards a novel as soon as the last page has been turned. It is in this spirit that the *Triune Path* is dedicated to the reader as a faithful and unobtrusive companion that might render a leg of the spiritual journey less arduous and lonely.

Along these pages, the reader will find that, apart from the few cases where the verses of the Gītā have been quoted in full to give more emphasis to the ideas propounded, they have ususally been given in brackets. The author has chosen this method purposely so that the reader may care to assimilate the spirit of the verse in its natural setting. The author would fall short of his promise if he were to conclude his arguments by simply reproducing the original verse and the reader would certainly fail in his endeavour to elaborate a synthesis if he were not constantly compelled to consult the text itself. By repeated and well-defined touches, the author gradually comes to the essence of the Gītā and on three occasions, in a wide sweep of his brush, he paints a global picture of the entire dialogue, giving it each time a different colouring (Chapters I, II, and III). These repeated attempts at a synthesis will enable the reader to move away from outer considerations and to get a deeper insight into the meaning of the text (Chapter IV) before the living Truth of the Divine Song may shine in all its luminosity (Chapter V).

It would be exaggerated and misleading to see any novelty in the ideas propounded in the *Triune Path.* In fact, they would loose all their value if they were considered to be original. When an author devotes himself to unravelling the truths of holy texts, the only admissible attitude seems to be one of humility for the revelation contained therein and one of respect for the tradition in which the particular text was born. What may be unique is an author's particular approach and the relevance of his findings for the readers of his epoch. In this respect, the author who was himself born and brought up in an orthodox environment and who followed the rigorous training in the discipline of Logic, does not deem it right to borrow elements of judgment from different cultural sources in order to throw more light on the Bhagavad Gītā. While acknowledging the high lineage of the Divine Song and while referring to its Vedic and Upaniṣadic precursors, he has given the Poem the eminent place it deserves. The Gītā possesses its own marks of excellence and little would be gained by introducing extraneous elements in its appraisal. Why should one quote Sanskrit poets or Buddhist texts, Shakespeare or Dante to bring home to the reader the profound truths of the Gītā? An eclectic approach that draws its inspiration from a patchwork of texts should on no account be mistaken for the universal message of a Scripture or the catholicity of view of its commentators. The essence of a holy text is the synthesis it offers from within itself and the confrontation of the commentator's living experience with this synthesis may help to bring about a new synthesis. For these reasons, the reading of the *Triune Path* may, at the beginning, seem a laborious task for a person who is not really familiar with the precepts expounded in the Gītā and it is particularly with this end in view that this "*dedication to the reader*" has been conceived as a framing for the principles of everlasting value which are to be found in the body of the work.

* * *

"What is night for all beings is the time of waking for the disciplined soul; and what is the time of waking for all beings is night for the sage who sees." (II, 69)

As the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra cast down his vacant look in utter helplessness and despair, the fiery eyes of the warrior Arjuna opened up in awe and dismay. The scenery was that of a battle and Arjuna's first reaction was to ask his divine charioteer, Kṛṣṇa, to draw up his vehicle in the middle of the two armies for a moment of reflection. Struck by the absurdity and the cruelty of the situation in which he found himself, he could not refrain from yielding to emotional weakness while the aged king, disconsolate at the idea of the unavoidability of the encounter, had no other recourse than asking his faithful charioteer Sañjaya to report the movement of the two warring parties. It is at this crucial moment that the voice of the Spirit, Kṛṣṇa, resounded in the battle-field.

This scene is so famous that it may sometimes be brushed aside too hastily by the reader in his eagerness to come to the heart of the Divine Song. But, it should never be forgotten that it is in the opening lines of all great creations of the Spirit that one is likely to find the foundation of their entire structure. By sharpening his look on all the minute details of the start of operations of the battle, the reader will realize that, although the protagonists seem to be separate identities, in reality, they represent different degrees of manifestation of a Unique Reality. Even the opposing armies in which one might see the symbols of good and evil forces are said to be related by blood, emphasizing thereby the intimate connection between these two aspects, as the reverse and the obverse of a single

Principle. And, what is more, the battle-field itself has been described as a field of order and harmony. Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Principle, is the cohesive Force that will, in the end, reconcile all these apparent contradictions. Apparent indeed they are when the events are taken in succession and the protagonists are viewed as individual beings. But, if the reader is able for a moment to raise himself to a higher vantage-point, he will at once discover the interconnectedness of all the elements concerned.

Despite all his efforts of logic and reasoning, the blind king has failed to avoid the grim encounter; his physical infirmity prevents him from having a direct perception of the battle-field and he is, therefore, to rely on the information given by Sañjaya. The blindness of the aged king is symbolic of the withdrawal of human consciousness from the field of activity of the senses to deeper realities within. The predicament of the old king is, in fact, the starting point of the soul's spiritual journey to its source. The king expects to hear the tidings from the battle and, surprisingly, what will instead be reported to him is the hushed dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna sitting on their chariot. At this point in time, Arjuna's voice is heard, as if the inner self that had been lying dormant, suddenly woke up under the stress of the situation. This voice is the echo of a higher principle calling from the depths of Consciousness, once man is willing to die to the logic of the senses and to all that is outwardly comprehensible. The inner voice asks for a moment of reflection so that a full view of the situation may offer itself to the inner being. But, even at this deeper level of understanding, Truth cannot yet be realized by the human intellect and there ensues a psychological breakdown. This hour of crisis causes the Spirit to manifest Itself and to take over the entire situation to such an extent that what was formerly a battle-field will become a field of harmony. It is only in this divine state of realization that a situation can be grasped in its wholeness and be brought piecemeal to the understanding of the purified human intellect, of which Arjuna is the striking symbol. And the leading theme of Kṛṣṇa's instructions is to surrender to Him. The entire teaching of the Gītā evolves around this central idea : Arjuna, the disciple in every human being, is to abandon the battle-field of his own creation to be reborn to the world of Kṛṣṇa which is one of Light, Peace and Unity. The recurring words "Come to me' are Kṛṣṇa's call to immortality, and, in this light, it is essential to note that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna have not been separated for a single moment. They were united on the same chariot at the beginning of the battle and, at the conclusion of the dialogue, Kṛṣṇa himself takes the reins and leads Arjuna into the thick of the battle. But, can it still be called a battle for Arjuna now that Kṛṣṇa has taken full charge of the situation and has promised victory ? For Arjuna, it has become an actionless action. It is the height of Realization, when the Divine and the human fuse so intimately into one another that what seemed an insurmountable obstacle on the empirical plane appears as a mere passing event when the light of wisdom dawns upon the Soul. It is the culmination of Yoga.

Seen in this perspective, the Bhagavad Gītā is not simply the narrative of the Soul's journey inward. It is much more as it proclaims the supreme moment of the askesis when the disciple is to make himself completely independent of all ties, physical, empirical and spiritual, to follow only the Call of the Transcendent that manifests also within. This explains the tremendous impact of the opening scene of the Gītā, Arjuna's breakdown and the immediate reclaim of his soul by the Spirit, Kṛṣṇa. To believe in this account is, of course, a matter of faith and personal conviction but to recognize the power of the Word that has made it come alive in the reader's heart is a matter of fact. In this connection, the reader may want to ponder over the role and nature of the reporter Sañjaya. Is it not through him that all the elements are bound together ? Were it not for his faithful reporting, what would have been heard of the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna ? Is it not the voice of the Poet himself, the author of the Bhagavad Gītā ? And, in what state did the Poet find himself when the divine dialogue unfolded in his heart ? The entire succession of the eighteen chapters was indeed a flash of intuition that may have lasted the time of an eye-wink, putting the poet in this blessed state in which Reality appeared to him as an undivided Whole. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna came to life in the Poets' inner being and with his beloved and inseparable companion, the Word, the Word in its pure essence, he transmitted this invaluable treasure to mankind. The Poet-Seer and the Word, the two in one, manifest the Eternal Spirit.

He is the realized Soul, the Divine Seer who carried within the entire unfoldment of the divine dialogue and who could transmit it to others. In this sense, the Bhagavad Gītā is absolutely Vedic in nature. It is the utterance of the Divine Poet brought to the field of action. The words in the Gītā are not ordinary vocables, the protagonists are not common beings but they are higher manifestations of the Divine Principle. This alone should inspire the reader to discover the essence of the Poem and to be reminded of his own divine nature each time he reads the Gītā. And, it is the humble and faithful voice of Sañjaya that is the connecting link between the Poet's state of realization and mankind as a whole. It is the echo of the Poet's inner vision and, at the same time, it stands for all the voices that have risen in the name of the Spirit only to die unheard and unnoticed. Is it not as a tribute to the All-pervasiveness of the Spirit that manifests in every living creature that the Divine Poet has chosen the modest voice of Sañjaya to transmit the wealth of his inner experience to mankind ? It is this mysterious and essential voice that acts as a hidden support for all the dramatis personae in the first chapter; it is the Spirit beyond the word, it is the eternal Witness, it is also the voice of tradition. It is, in the end, the almost unnoticed presence of the majestic Transcendent. This voice symbolizes the incessant and unseen work of the Spirit in nature. This alone is a great teaching in the Gītā : that, often, great Seers like to be clad in the most modest garments. This is a central Truth in the Gita about Kṛṣṇa, the Divine himself, who acted as a simple charioteer.

This humble voice is the witness in man and if only the human being could be stationed permanently in the role of witness to all events and phenomena, he would be in a state of eternal communion with the Divine. Man is and remains for all times the glorious creation of the Supreme, and, Word as a form of expression, his inseparable companion, is the precious means that takes him to the Beyond. Whereas words are practically powerless to convey the nature of the Ultimate Experience, they remain the highest and most perfect means to attain to that state. It is no wonder, therefore, that the esoteric part of the teachings in the Gītā are concluded by an exposition of the expression Aum Tat Sat. All the words uttered in the seventeen chapters of the Poem resolve themselves in the Word. The last notes of the Divine Song could have expired there but the Divine Poet who had realized the true nature of Kṛṣṇa, which is one of unbounded love for the whole of humanity, added an encouraging note, by saying :

"And he who studies this sacred dialogue of ours, by him I would be worshipped through the sacrifice of knowledge, so I hold," (XVIII, 70)

The *Triune Path* is a living proof of the reality of the Lord's words, as it was composed in the most blessed circumstances. An initial unexpected encounter in Kurukṣetra itself, was followed by a year of meetings during which the Gītā was read, explained and studied. Notes and tapes were collected that were to serve as the basis of a deeper study, as well as the manuscripts of three lectures given by the author some ten years ago. But, a period of silence was to ensue, for reasons known only to the Supreme, until a new meeting happened that was to be the starting point of the present series of works. It shows in all clarity that all happens at His will and can only flower with His will. A disciple may meet a master, a master may choose a disciple, but, it is only when the invisible Presence of the Lord makes itself felt that it can blossom in full. This book is a testimony to the unbelievable, mysterious loving Power that is the Supreme Reality working in each one of us, for each one of us and beyond us all.

Were it not for the author's inspiration, his loving guidance and the sacred bond that unites us, even an humble effort like this introductory essay could not have materialized. May it be a source of inspiration for those readers who discover the Gītā, and, for those already familiar with the Divine Song, may it be accepted with indulgence and sympathy !

VARANASI
MARCH 23,1982

KANCHI

INTRODUCTION

"At the end of many lives, the man of wisdom resorts to Me, knowing that Vāsudeva (the Supreme) is all that is. Such a great soul is very difficult to find." (VII. 19)

Who is this Vāsudeva ? The Bhāgavata Purāṇa describes him as the eighth son of Vasudeva. He was born in the prison-house of Kaṁsa, the ruler of the kingdom of Mathurā. Immediately after his birth, his father took him across the river Yamunā, to Gokula. There, he placed the new-born baby under the care of his friend Nanda for he feared that King Kaṁsa, who had the premonition that the eighth child born to Devakī and Vasudeva would be his slayer, would murder the innocent infant. Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, is thus born of human parents and he himself is human with all the limitations of this form of existence. In another passage of the same Purāṇa, Vāsudeva is shown to live as an ordinary human being while concealing his real nature as Truth incarnate.

The question thus arises as to his authentic form which can only be realized by the wise who have acquired true knowledge in the course of many existences. Unless human consciousness is raised to the highest level, unless the intuitive flash gains the maximum luminosity (which happens only on rare occasions), man will not be in a position to experience the identification of Vāsudeva with the Ubiquitous Principle.

The Lord, therefore, takes up the role of an "ācārya", a teacher, and he spares no effort to draw out of his human disciple the sterling qualities that will make him fit for the highest realization. He is the Creator and he knows the quality of the materials out of which the objects of his creation are made. He is aware of the fact that neither the human intellect, "buddhi", nor the mind, "manas" will be of any help to the disciple if they are not fixed on Him. Out of unbounded love, the Lord inspires his disciple to surrender completely to Him and He assures him of a definite triumph over the forces of nescience that not only cause confusion but depression and despair as well.

In this spirit, the Bhagavad Gītā is not to be read as an example of didactic poetry or a treatise of philosophy only, but, it is to be felt as the fountain-source of the perennial love that flows from the Divine and blesses the human disciple with unending bliss.

The "ācārya", the divine, and the disciple, the human, are welded together through subtle and unbreakable bonds of love and affection and when this is realized by the disciple, he rests in a state of emancipation which is only another name for freedom from egoistic tendencies.

The Song Celestial is the compassionate and melodious call of the Supreme who is ever anxious to see the human being return to Him in an act of selfless and devoted love. This play of the Divine with the human is the invisible thread that unites the different parts of the Bhagavad Gītā.

In this book, the author does not venture to extract a message from the Gītā which he could claim to be his own interpretation of the Divine Song. He simply invites the reader to embark on a spiritual adventure with him and to discover once again the essence of the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā.

This is why each chapter of the book presents the spiritual journey of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in a synthetic manner. The Divine Dialogue is seen from various angles and it is appreciated at different levels; but each time, the all-embracing treatment of the subject has prevailed over the fragmented analytical study. After having given some historical and philosophical considerations on the Poem, the author offers an elaborate description of the nature of the dialogue itself which culminates in the exposition of the Triune Path. And, he concludes by showing that the ultimate objective of any spiritual pilgrimage is an unconditional surrender to the ever-flowing current of Love emanating from the Divine.

In so doing, the author fervently hopes that the reader will gain the necessary insight not only to study the Poem as a remarkable piece of religious literature but also to discover within himself the mystery of the interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Supreme Reality.

THE TRIUNE PATH

CHAPTER ONE

In one of the introductory verses that are recited before the ceremonial chanting of the entire Poem, it is mentioned that the Bhagavad Gītā forms the very quintessence of all Upaniṣads. Now, the basic meaning of the term, Upaniṣad, is 'secret knowledge'. This secrecy of the Upaniṣadic knowledge lies in the fact that it is something different from and deeper than knowledge obtainable from the secular sciences. Śaṅkara, the great Indian monist, while clarifying the etymological meaning of the term states that Upaniṣad is so called as the whole illusion of the created world is uprooted with the dawning of the knowledge contained therein. It is not intellectual knowledge that is imparted by the Upaniṣads but it is something higher and more comprehensive. It should not be misconstrued either that the Upaniṣads lead us to mysticism and carry us away from the domain of logic and reason; on the contrary, the truth contained in the Upaniṣads is an embodiment of the highest reason, being the cream and essence of the Veda, the repository of all wisdom.

A traditional student of the Vedas knows that the entire Vedic literature comprising the Saṁhitās, the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas and the Upaniṣads is revealed literature. The Vedas, according to the traditional view, were revealed to the ancient seers, blessed with spiritual enlightenment. Endowed with the eye of inner wisdom, they could see the Vedic hymns, the embodiments of Truth and were described as seers of hymns and not their composers. The authority of the Vedas is, thus, unimpeachable and as they were not composed by any agency, human or divine, their infallibility remains unquestioned. It should be mentioned, however, in this context, that there are other schools of thought in India that proclaim the authority of the Vedas on the ground that they were created by God. Veda means the word of a reliable authority.And,who could be more infallible than God himself? The Veda, therefore, contains eternal Truth; so, also, the Upaniṣads that form a part thereof. In the same spirit, the Lord is said to have sung the Bhagavad Gītā -as the Sanskrit word implies- to His devotee Arjuna on the occasion of the battle of Kurukṣetra which according to the traditional view is believed to have taken place in the year 3101 B.C. Like all other Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā contains living truths which raise it above any historical or local limitations and bring it to a plane of metaphysical enquiry that can benefit humanity at large.

The spirit of the Gītā is profound and universal and it is for this reason that it has been looked upon as the fountain-source from which different schools of philosophical thought and different scholars have drawn their inspiration regardless of its possible identification with any particular line of thinking. The Gītā is essentially Upaniṣadic in spirit, being the voice of the Lord, in His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa. The truths revealed therein are universal in character and it is an undeniable fact that the Gītā does not contain any element that may be branded as purely sectarian or dogmatic. It can, of course, be argued that the Gītā has taken into account various creeds and codes that were current at the time of its composition but it may be stated in a fitting reply that these were transformed in the light of a spiritual synthesis so characteristic of the literature of the Upaniṣads. In its most comprehensive sweep, elements that may appear to be possessed of temporal or local value found an orientation that gave them a most sublime and profound character.

It would, however, be wrong to state that there was no historical occasion for the Gītā to be sung. In the opening verse of the first chapter, it is clearly stated that it was in the field of Kurukṣetra–the township situated on the very spot of today's locality by the same name in the province of modern Haryana, in northern parts of India–that a battle was to be fought between two blood-related dynasties, the Kauravas and the Pāṇdavas. The head of the Kaurava dynasty was the blind king Dhṛtaṛāṣṭra who failed to persuade his sons, Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers, to part with some territory in favour of the sons of his younger brother Pāṇḍu, head of the Pāṇḍava dynasty, who had died a premature death, leaving his five sons–Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva–in distress. As a consequence of his failure, a war was declared between the two parties which was to last for eighteen days culminating in the victory of the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, the two main protagonists of the Gītā were themselves on the battle-field as members of the Pāṇḍava party. Indeed, when the two opposing armies were arrayed, the Pāṇḍavas headed by Yudhiṣṭhira sought the aid of Kṛṣṇa, their nephew, then King of Dvārakā. Owing to his double connection with the two dynasties, Kṛṣṇa declined to take an active part in the battle but accepted to act as Arjuna's charioteer only. At the onset of the grim encounter, the blind king was profoundly aggrieved and agitated as this event was the outcome of a family feud that no peaceful means had been able to settle and avert. So, he requested one of the charioteers, Sañjaya, to act as a reporter to inform him of all the tidings about the battle.

This is, in a nutshell, the historical background against which the Gītā was recited allowing the reader to imagine for himself the great distress in which the gallant Arjuna found himself when the Divine Personality of Kṛṣṇa started addressing him, in his spirit of compassion. In truth, Arjuna's personality as a warrior of the Kṣatriya caste was outstanding. Amongst all the disciples of his teacher, Droṇa, he was the most brilliant one. As a result of very arduous penance, he had acquired great moral and physical strength and he was considered to be the most forceful amongst his contemporaries. The Mahābhārata, of which the Gītā is a part, abounds in detailed descriptions of his achievements as a foremost archer and a man of high moral standard.

Although the outcome of the battle seemed to be a foregone conclusion when Kṛṣṇa decided to lend his support to the Pāṇḍavas and act as the charioteer of Arjuna, still the latter gave way to psychological weakness when he was reluctant to strike at the Kauravas who were his relations, particularly since Bhīṣma, his grandfather, and Droṇa, his teacher, were in their ranks. It is in this state of mind that Arjuna lowered his bow and arrow and uttered the words "I will not fight" (II, 1), thereby inspiring his divine companion, Kṛṣṇa, to come to his rescue and pull him out of the state of depression into which he had sunk. After hearing Kṛṣṇa's inspiring instructions, Arjuna could slowly regain his mental balance and overcome his weakness, so much so, that he grew determined to wage a battle which could only happen for a right cause.

What, however, seems baffling to the human understanding, is that the seven hundred verses of the Lord's Song could have been droned out at an hour when the two parties were about to strike at each other. As Arjuna decided to withdraw from the battle-field stating reasons for his decision, Kṛṣṇa initiated a dialogue which, by no stretch of imagination, could have fully unfolded itself in such a short lapse of time or which would have been allowed to take place, keeping the two opposing armies in abeyance. The answer to this question is not to be sought in a systematic examination of chronological facts. It is to be noted that the historicity of the event is not as vital as the metaphysical purport which the author had in view and tried to present. That a Bhāratan war took place long before the beginning of the Christian era is admitted on all hands; but, the propriety or otherwise of the dialogue between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna should not be discussed in this context. The discourse is purported to highlight the psychic happenings and the way and method by which Kṛṣṇa counteracts them with the help of dialectics and metaphysical arguments at first, and with spiritual knowledge later on. The apparent incongruity, therefore, is absolutely immaterial in this regard. More so, it could be argued that it is not by mere coincidence that the very moment of the outbreak of a battle had been chosen by the Lord to deliver his message to one of the main protagonists on the field. As is vividly described in chapter one—the chapter which is more often than not overlooked by those writers who enter immediately in the metaphysical core of the Gītā—"The tumultuous uproar resounding through earth and sky rent the hearts of

Dhṛtarāṣṭra's sons. Then Arjuna, whose banner bore the crest of Hanūmān, looked at the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra drawn up in battle order and as the flight of missiles almost started, he took up his bow." (I,19-20). The choice of this particular moment only points to the unavoidability of the event. What had been set in motion could no longer be stopped but what could indeed happen was the salvation of a human soul from the doubts and darkness which had covered it up, using the occasion, however bloody, as a living illustration and an empirical application of the manifestation of Truth.

Coming back to the matter at hand, it is quite understandable that Kṛṣṇa could appreciate the logic in Arjuna's arguments against joining battle with his own relatives and he, therefore, uttered words which were convincing enough to remove the doubts clouding up Arjuna's mind. In fact, a few verses in the second chapter of the Poem may be considered to be of sufficient value to allay Arjuna's doubts but the Divine Teacher did not rest contented with such utterances. This is why the main thrust of the second chapter which, in and by itself, contains the cardinal teachings of the Gītā developed later in the following chapters, is given on the paramount statement about the permanence of the Self. It is this shifting of emphasis from the right judgment about one's duties on the empirical plane to a deeper understanding of and discrimination between the eternal nature of the Self and the ephemeral character of all that is not the Self that raises the entire dialogue as well as the consciousness of the listener to a loftier plane. Understandably so, the Gītā is not intended so much to portray a historical event and the various considerations connected with it, event which undeniably played an important role in the life of the Indian people in the remote past but it possesses a value which is to be appreciated from the metaphysical point of view.

This distinction between the historical setting of the Gītā and the philosophical content of the dialogue should not, however, be misunderstood as meaning that these two aspects are divorced from one another. On the contrary, Kṛṣṇa's exhortation to Arjuna is meant to help him to rise above the empirical plane so that he may be in a position to judge the situation in which he finds himself in a spirit of detachment and impartiality. Unless Arjuna's metaphysical insight deepens and expands, it would never be possible for him to act on the empirical plane with the skill and confidence that are expected of him. Kṛṣṇa's enquiry into Arjuna's meandering thoughts is not intended, therefore, to allow the latter to shrink from his duty as a warrior on the grounds of sentimental piety but rather to compel him to boldly face the unavoidability of the predicament that is his. But, at the same time Kṛṣṇa imparts a spiritual teaching to his companion, teaching that will allow him to face the situation and still be reborn to a higher Truth. This is why, in the epilogue of the Gītā, Arjuna exclaims :— "Destroyed is my delusion and recognition has been gained by me through Thy grace, O Acyuta. I stand firm with my doubts dispelled. I shall act according to Thy word." (XVIII, 73). To act on the empirical plane is an unavoidable necessity for an embodied soul and to act in the light of spiritual Truth is all that is expected of a human being. This quest, so dear to the human heart, has found an admirable echo in the melodious verses of the Gītā and it will be shown in the succeeding chapters of the book how Arjuna's soul—anyone's soul for that matter—is taken up by the Spirit, in this case incarnated as Lord Kṛṣṇa, and made to act on the empirical plane without, therefore, being divorced from its spiritual vocation. Using the event merely as an occasion, the Lord imparts his teaching and brings his disciple to a plane from which there is no possibility of any return to the state of doubt and vacillation in which he found him at the beginning. This being said, however, it would not deprive the Gītā of its fullness as a metaphysical treatise if some words are given about the historicity of the event which may be treated as a prelude to more momentous issues discussed and developed in the body of the work.

The Gītā is a part of the Bhīṣmā-parvan, one of the eighteen books (parvan) of the Great Indian Epic, the Mahābhārata that depicts in the main the bloody battle between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, where Kṛṣṇa acts as the charioteer of Arjuna, the third Pāṇḍava. The Mahābhārata is known to be the work of sage Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, also called Vyāsa. The story runs that Vyāsa, the sage, imparted the work to his pupil Vaiśampāyana who recited the whole Poem in the intervals of a great snake sacrifice of King Janamejaya. On that occasion, it was heard by Sūta Ugraśravas, son of sage Lomaharṣaṇa.

The extant text of the Mahābhārata is what Sūta Ugraśravas narrated in the assembly of sages at the twelve-yearly sacrifice of Śaunaka in the forest of Naimiṣa. Thus, Ugraśravas is the reciter of the outline story while in the Poem itself, Vaiśampāyana is the speaker. Within the narrative of Vaiśampāyana, numerous inserted stories are put in the mouth of different persons and it may be mentioned in this context that such insertion of stories within stories is a very common phenomenon in Indian literature.

A study of these facts may tend to suggest that the Great Epic gradually developed into its present form from a smaller poem and further, that the work is not from the pen of a single poet or even a single compiler. But, it needs to be said that the very fact that the Mahābhārata represents a whole literature and should not be looked upon as a single unified poetic production has made it a valuable record enabling the reader to gain insight into the depth of the Indian soul. It is, of course, extremely difficult to separate, at this distant date, the grain from the chaff. However, it appears that in the first book itself there is a statement according to which the Epic consisted of twenty-four thousand verses at a certain time, while in another context it is found that it consisted of eight thousand eight hundred verses only. These statements may definitely lead to the conclusion that there are at least three principal stages of development before the Epic could assume its present form. It is, in fact, not possible to say whether the Gītā of about seven hundred verses in eighteen chapters belonged to the kernel of eight thousand eight hundred verses or to the subsequent form of twenty four thousand verses or whether it was composed at any intervening period. All that can be stated is that the extant text of the Epic in one hundred thousand verses contains the Gītā, the eighteen chapters of which correspond to chapters XXIII–XI of the Bhīṣma–parvan.

From what has been said above, it appears that the age of the Mahābhārata as a whole cannot be determined with precision; for, to determine the age of the Epic, the date of every part of it is to be found out. In the Vedas, there is no mention of the event of the great Kurukṣetra battle. In the Brāhmaṇas, however, the holy Kuru-field is described as a place of pilgrimage where gods and mortals celebrated big sacrificial feasts. One may find the names of Janamejaya and Bharata in the Brāhmaṇa literature. The name of Parīkṣita as a ruler of the Kuru-land is found in the Atharva-Veda. Kurus and Pāñcālas have been mentioned in the Yajur-Veda. The Kāṭhaka Saṁhitā records the name of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, son of Vicitravīrya. There is a reference to a war in Kuru land in the Sāṅkhyāyana Srauta-sūtra which proved fatal to the Kauravas. The Āśvalāyana Gṛhya-sūtra gives the names of Bhārata and Mahābhārata in a list of teachers and books. Pāṇini, the author of the Sūtras on Sanskrit grammar, derives the words, Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and Vidura and gives the accent in the compound, Mahābhārata. Patañjali, in his Mahābhāṣya, makes definite allusions to the story of the battle between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas. Though the Buddhist Tripiṭaka does not mention the Mahābhārata, yet the Jātakas appear to betray acquaintance with it. It may be justified on the strength of the facts mentioned above that though an epic Mahābhārata did not exist in the Vedic age, single myths, legends and poems included in the Mahābhārata date back to a very early period of Indian history. But, it must be remembered that even then the exact date of composition of the Gītā cannot be definitely determined. All that can be mentioned with certainty is that one of the earliest commentators of the Gītā is Śaṅkara, who belongs to the seventh or eighth century A. D. Śaṅkara refers to a few earlier commentators on the Poem whose works unfortunately have not come down to us. More recently, Indian and foreign scholars have attempted to affix a date to the composition of the Gītā. According to Edgerton and Winternitz, the Gītā was probably .composed in the beginning of the Christian era but not more than a few centuries before. Garbe assigns an original smaller Gītā to 260 B.C. and the present redaction of it to 200 A.D. Senart thinks that it was composed in the third century B.C. According to Telang the Gītā is earlier than the third century B.C. Bhandarkar places the work at a period not later than the beginning of the fourth century. B.C. Tilak traces a verse of the Gītā back to the Bodhāyana Gṛhyasūtras (II,22,g) which are not later than the fourth or fifth century B.C.

In this context, it would not be out of place to mention that there have been, likewise, attempts at fixing the date of the great battle at Kurukṣetra. According to the noted Indian astronomer Āryabhaṭṭa (476 A.D.), the great battle took place in 3101 B.C. Bhāskarācārya, yet another astronomer of repute confirms the date. In the Aihole inscription of Pulakeśin II of the Cālukya dynasty (634 A.D.), it is stated that the date of inscription is 3735 years after the Great Bhāratan war. So, the Bhāratan war is to be placed 3179 years before the Śaka era (3101 B.C.). But, Varāhamihira differs a little and states in his Bṛhatsaṁhitā that Yudhiṣṭhira ascended the throne in 2448 B.C. From this Kalhaṇa in his Rājataraṅgiṇī comes to the conclusion that Yudhiṣṭhira became king in 653 of the Kali era : when

653 years of the Kali age had passed, the Kurus and the Pāṇḍavas lived on earth. In the Bhārata Sāvitrī, the geat battle is said to have started on the thirteenth lunar day of the bright fortnight in the month of Agrahāyaṇa of the Indian calendar (November-December) and ended on the following new moon day. The very next day, Yudhiṣṭhira was coronated king. Forty five days after this, on the full moon day of the month of Māgha, (February-March) the Kali era started. All these events took place in 3101 B.C.

Whatever may be advanced from the historical point of view, it should never be forgotten that the Bhagavad Gītā is first and foremost a sacred text of which the central figure is Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of the Lord. He is the main pivot on which rests and revolves the course of events relating to the theme of the Poem; and, hence, the dialogue in which he plays the major role as a trusted and dependable guide is expected to be an integral part of the original epic and may not be the composition of some unknown and unidentified author.

The Poem has been read and studied with unflinching devotion and inspiring reverence through the centuries and its value and importance have been recognized not only in India but beyond its borders. Indian scholars of all ages have taken up a vow as it were to devote themselves to the task of unfolding its message for humanity in its arduous and difficult journey of life amidst baffling and bewildering situations. Its universal character and its eternal spirit make it a priceless treasure that represents the cream of Indian culture.

CHAPTER TWO

The Upaniṣads are called Brahmavidyā, a metaphysical and philosophical understanding of the Absolute that is an Ubiquitous Principle. Whether the Highest Reality, the Absolute, is Brahman, the Immutable Principle of Monistic Vedānta, the Paramātman of the Yogis or the Bhagavat of the adherents to the Bhāgavata Philosophy, it is a Unity, "Advaita tattva", second to none. It is the Transcendent Reality in which the phenomenal existence of the universe is rooted. The world is a continuous everflowing process of events beyond which reigns the Brahman, the Absolute, devoid of all limitations imposed by time and space and destitute of all attributes. It is identical in essence with each and every object found in creation. The Brahman is, therefore, identical with the individual self. This identity can be discovered and felt only by spiritual experience.

Other descriptions of the Absolute worth mentioning are found in the Upaniṣads and other philosophical texts. According to the Brahma-sūtras of sage Bādarāyaṇa (third century B.C.), the Brahman is the origin, the support and the end of this world, the efficient and material cause of the Universe. It is endowed with all attributes and it is the inner guide and law. It stands aloof from primordial matter and from the empirical self. It is omniscient, omnipotent, pure and true. Its seat is found in the heart of every human being. These descriptions refer to what is technically called the Saguṇa Brahman, the Brahman with attributes, as distinguishable from the Nirguṇa Brahman, the Brahman devoid of attributes. Albeit the Brahman has been contemplated in two forms in the various philosophical texts, it is to be remembered that it is, first and foremost, a Unity par excellence, shining beyond all attributes, Guṇātīta Brahman, the Brahman beyond the modes. In the Ṛg Veda, one of the most ancient revealed texts of Hindu philosophy, the Brahman is referred to as 'Tad ekam' one without a second, without attributes or qualities. The Upaniṣads which represent the philosophical synthesis of the Vedas state in unambiguous terms that in Brahman, the quality of known and knowing is obliterated or transcended. It is the locus where the knower of the difference between the knower and the known turns out to be the Self itself and, thus, ceases to exist as the knower. Besides, it should be emphasized that even when the Brahman is called the Unitary Principle, it is so defined in the light of the impressions acquired through empirical experience and no more. What is meant here by Unitary Principle is that it is not duality. Consequently, the Brahman is believed to be a simplicity that baffles imagination and defies all descriptions. As in the Upaniṣads, so also in the Gītā, it is stated:

"He is said to be unmanifest, unthinkable, unchanging. Therefore, knowing him as such, thou shouldst not grieve" (II, 25). Once the truth about the Brahman is realized, it can be more easily understood that contradictory attributes define it, only to show that the Brahman supersedes any empirical evaluation and that it rests in its own glory, unique and sublime.

In the Mahābhārata also the Lord is described as invisible, immeasurable, untouchable, attributeless, partless, unborn, eternal, permanent and actionless. As Monistic Vedanta, of which sage Yājñavalkya is one of the most outstanding exponents, portrays the Unqualified Brahman as the very essence of the Upaniṣads, the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism, in like manner, regards the Ultimate Principle as Śūnya (Void). Whatever may be the denominations propounded by the various schools of philosophy, the question of the very existence of the Ultimate Principle imposes itself at this juncture.

If the Ultimate Principle be beyond all descriptions, what then would be the proof for its existence? Spiritual wisdom only can give the proof of its existence; for, spiritual wisdom is itself the living testimony of the reality of a Transcendent Principle. But, spiritual wisdom requires logical investigation or philosophical interpretation as an aid to its attainment. Enquiry is the golden way that leads to spiritual wisdom. Just as the objects of the world are seen with the help of physical light, so also the torch of enquiry illuminates the path to wisdom.

The Gītā equips us with the logical and metaphysical interpretation necessary for the attainment of the spiritual objective; and, in this sense, it is regarded as a treatise on Brahmavidyā. Brahmavidyā is discussed by Kṛṣṇa in the first part of the second chapter. His intention was to remind Arjuna of the fundamental difference between Brahman, the Self, which is the Transcendental Identity and the empirical self which is amenable to change and destruction. He made it clear that all that is empirical is subject to change, decay and destruction; and, as such, the corporeal identities have no intrinsic value in themselves. It is the Self which has a perennial existence, it is without a beginning or an end; and, it remains the same in the midst of all changes and transformations that occur on the empirical plane. When one realizes the nature of the Self, one is no longer distressed by the thought of empirical gain or loss, victory or defeat, pleasure or pain. Dwelling on the transcendent nature of the Self and the evanescent character of all that is empirical, Kṛṣṇa sought to dispel the fears of Arjuna when the latter was at a loss to find his way in the midst of doubts clouding up his intellect to such an extent that he practically decided to stay away from the battle. It should be underlined in this context that Kṛṣṇa realized that, being in such a distressed state of mind, Arjuna would not be able to comprehend the deeper implications of Brahmavidyā which the Lord had been imparting on him. Hence, he offered to Arjuna a more suitable approach which would enable him to find out for himself the line to be adopted in order to reach his goal notwithstanding the difficult enterprise that was in store for him at this crucial moment of his life.

This method, better suited to Arjuna's temperament and conditions of the moment, finds its expression in the second part of chapter two and it has been responsible for qualifying the Gītā not only as Brahmavidyā but also as Yoga-śāstra. After offering all the metaphysical arguments about the existence of the Self, Kṛṣṇa proposes to Arjuna a method of action, a practical way, that of karma-yoga, the yoga of action, or to be more precise the niṣkāma-karma-yoga, the yoga of selfless action. This yoga, along with jñāna-yoga, the yoga of knowledge, is regarded as one of the two fundamental paths leading to the realization of the Supreme Reality.

And, there undoubtedly exists a profound link between the knowledge of Brahman and the path of action as is evidenced in several verses towards the close of the second chapter where it is stated that those who are steady in wisdom act on the empirical plane in such a way that they remain entirely unaffected by and unattached to the consequences deriving from their actions. (II, 70 72). Citing the attitude of the wise as an example to be followed by Arjuna, the best amongst human beings, as he is often called in the Poem, Kṛṣṇa, the Divine Teacher, advocates that the results of one's actions should not produce any reaction, favourable or unfavourable, in the performer as they do not relate to the Self in the least; since the latter, by its very nature, can never be attached to them and they only concern the empirical self which, by definition, is ever-changing, destructible and limited.

This path of action, niṣkāma-karma-yoga, has been further described in the third chapter where the Lord gives himself in example, revealing to his beloved companion that he himself is forced to act for the preservation of the world order and were he to refrain from acting, the whole universe would go out of existence; but, despite his manifold actions, he remains supremely unattached to the results accruing from them. This is the lesson that humanity as a whole should draw from the mode of action of the Lord of the Universe himself. And Kṛṣṇa throws further light on the concept of karma-yoga when he reminds Arjuna that since he himself acts in such a way and since he is the Lord of the Universe, it follows quite naturally that Arjuna, and likewise all his fellow human beings, should draw inspiration from the actions of the Lord and render unto him the fruits of their own deeds. Such a noble attitude can only be born in a man's heart when he will grow in his intensity of love for the Permanent Reality shunning gradually all that is not the Supreme and he will then be in a position to offer unhesitatingly and dispassionately all the results of his actions to the Lord. In this brilliant exposition, Kṛṣṇa has already sown the seed of the "Triune Path", the triple way of spiritual journey, consisting of karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga and bhakti-yoga, which constitutes the dynamic movement, the rhythm that runs through the various chapters of the Poem.

Indeed, in chapter two, the essential teachings of the Gītā are to be found in a condensed and nuclear form, guided by two cardinal principles, that of Brahmavidyā and that of Yoga-śāstra, guided literally speaking along a triune path that is to unfold all the mysteries of yoga in the following chapters, not adding anything new but simply emphasizing and analyzing the different aspects of the spiritual message enshrined in chapter two. It is thus seen that the succession of chapters does not consist of a linear progression of thought but rather of an unfoldment of the various facets of the dual principle advocated in the second chapter. As will be seen later, the succession of chapters could be construed as representing so many landmarks standing out in the arduous journey of Arjuna to reach the cherished goal. This gradual and harmonious unfoldment of the truths pre-existent in the second chapter has gained the Gītā its title of Yoga-śāstra as well.

How can Yoga be called Śāstra, it being understood that by Śāstra is meant the body of scriptures regulating man's moral conduct and guiding his spiritual life or, in other words, the body of scriptures to be found in any religion ?

Yoga is union, union with the Supreme Principle, so eloquently described in the Upaniṣadic lore and the Gītā is the Śāstra for union with the Ultimate Reality, union which may be achieved in ways more than one. So, it should not be overlooked that the Gītā, while being the repository of Brahmavidyā, is at the same time the storehouse of Yoga-śāstra. But, before embarking on an examination of the various methods propounded, it is worth touching upon the concept of yoga once again as it constitutes the mainstay of the Divine Song.

The entire Vedic literature throughout its different phases unfolds the glory of jñāna-yoga and karma-yoga. The Brāhmaṇa passage, "He who knows it also gets the result", is a pointer to the fact that since times immemorial Indian culture has been advocating the cause of a most intimate fusion of jñāna and karma in the domain of spiritual life. It is not necessary to put separate emphasis on any one of these two yogas as some later-day philosophers have done it. This fusion has also found its expression in the seventh chapter of the Gītā where the Lord declares that of the four types of devotees one who is blessed with knowledge is the foremost. This vital point of coordination and fusion that is so essential for the manifestation of Expanded Consciousness is consistently maintained in numerous places in the text of the Gītā. In view of the paramount importance of this concept in the general structure of the Gītā, it would be in the fitness of things to underline once again that Yoga means union, even at the cost of repeating arguments which have already been touched upon earlier.

"Forewarned is forearmed" as the proverb goes, and in the spiritual journey which has been described as being more hazardous than walking barefooted on the sharp edge of a razor, one can only be too well advised to be vigilant and alert. Indeed, the human being must see that he is united to the Lord. But, so long as he remains fettered by egoistic tendencies, it is not possible for him to take to a life of spiritual practice. Now, egoistic tendencies are innate to every human being; and, as such, they are not easily controlled. They can only be subdued if there are situations in which man finds himself in a state of utter despair and confusion. In either of these two states of mind, the human being looses faith in his own power of judgment and he seems to go astray. It is, therefore, that, when he felt aggrieved and dejected, Arjuna lost his way, but he was fortunate enough to find Kṛṣṇa by his side and he fell to his knees to seek for his advice. It appears, therefore that even dejection and distress can bring a human soul close to the Lord.

As ignorance which springs from egoistic tendencies can only be removed by knowledge, the Lord started his discourse on the nature of the Self nad reminded Arjuna that things empirical could not be ever-lasting. But, he knew fully well that a mere academic discourse would not enable his listener to grasp the whole issue. So, Kṛṣṇa exhorted him to act and developed the path of niṣkāma-karma-yoga. These are the two pillars that sustain the monumental chapter two. To perform one's duties selflessly and to offer the results of one's actions to the Lord bring one nearer to Him. Such is the principle expounded in the third chapter. But, the Lord knew fully well that karma-yoga had to be supplemented by jñāna-yoga, as the fourth chapter shows; not contented with offering the fruits of one's actions to the Lord, one must also see that an end is put to all activities when the knowledge of the Self dawns. But, this is an extremely difficult task as long as the mind is active. And, as a means towards that end, chapter six gives a brilliant exposition of a spiritual practice that results in detachment of the senses from their sense-objects avoiding thereby the harmful consequences of grief and desire.

The first six chapters of the Poem sing the glories of karma-yoga, chapters seven to twelve give the different facets of bhakti as a yoga and the last six chapters contain the cream of jñāna-yoga. Whereas the thirteenth chapter highlights a dissertation on the difference between the field of enjoyment that is the physical body and the enjoyer, the fourteenth chapter presents a description of the three-fold modes and the way of transcending them. The question of a personal God as well as that of primordial Matter and Transcendent Reality are debated in the fifteenth chapter. In the sixteenth chapter, a new analysis is given of the dual qualities inherent in every human being, that of good and evil, as well as the way of overcoming this duality and resting eternally in Consciousness and Truth. The thrust of the eighteenth chapter lies in the Lord's discourse on the state of realization which impresses Arjuna so much that he feels that his fears are allayed, his doubts removed and he has received the blessings of the Lord : he has found the way to be followed and he gets himself ready for the fight for which he came to the battlefield.

It shines out clearly, therefore, that the subject-matter of all the chapters of the Gītā dwells in some form or other on the contact of the individual self with the Lord or the Supreme Principle. The yoga of the Gītā is all-embracing in nature and complete in essence. It shines like a priceless diamond set in the velvety words of the Divine Song which gives it a shelter and a lustre of its own. It sends out its fiery rays from the manyfolded facets which had been cut into it by the inquisitive mind of the spiritual seeker. It is the latter who has compelled the Divine Teacher to show before his very eyes the glittering facets of this precious gem, but, this does not still withdraw in the least the shining power which pre-existed to its elaborate cutting and which only became manifest through this process for the human eye to see. But, for one who is endowed with the inner vision, the discrimination between an ordinary rock and a precious gem is spontaneous and immediate and he does not require to be guided along this arduous and protracted path unfolded in the eighteen chapters of the Gītā. A path of yoga indeed it is and each chapter is a milestone on the way, a point of contact, so to say, with the Supreme Goal dimly seen in the distance. This is why each one of the eighteen chapters of the Poem bears the title of Yoga with a different denomination in each case; but, this does not mean that each chapter forms a discreet unit in and by itself.* On the contrary, it has been clearly demonstrated earlier how all the chapters are woven into an organic whole with the triple thread of karma, jñāna and bhakti. As a striking example of this interconnectedness, it may be mentioned that Arjuna at the beginning of chapter five confesses his bewilderment to Kṛṣṇa stating that the Lord had praised the excellence of karma-yoga only to extol a moment later the supremacy of jñana-yoga. Arjuna, a rational being, admits his incapacity at discovering the Truth in the Lord's words.

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* 1. The Yoga of depression (viṣāda) 2. The Yoga of knowledge (sāṁkhya) 3. The Yoga of action (karma) 4. The Yoga of divine knowledge (jñana) 5. The Yoga of renunciation of action (karma-sanyāsa) 6. The Yoga of meditation (dhyāna) 7. The Yoga of wisdom and knowledge (jñana and vijñana) 8. The Yoga of the imperishable Absolute (akṣara-brahman) 9. The Yoga of sovereign knowledge and mastery (rāja-vidyā) 10. The Yoga of divine manifestation (vibhūti) 11. The Yoga of the vision of the cosmic form (viśvarūpa-darśana) 12. The Yoga of devotion (bhakti) 13. The Yoga of distinction between the field and the knower of the field (kṣarākṣara-vibhāga) 14. The Yoga of differentiation of the three modes (guṇa-traya-vibhāga) 15 The Yoga of the supreme person (puruṣottama) 16. The Yoga of distinction between the divine and the demonic endowments (daivāsura-sampad-vibhāga) 17. The Yoga of threefold division of faith (śraddhātraya-vibhāga) 18. The Yoga of release (mokṣa)

"Thou praisest, Kṛṣṇa, the renunciation of works and again their unselfish performance. Tell me for certain which one is better of these two". (V,1) Moved by divine compassion, the Lord takes pains to explain to Arjuna the very nature of karma-yoga and again turns round to enunciate the vital principles of jñāna-yoga proving thereby that the fusion of spiritual practice and knowledge forms an organic and homogeneous whole the contents of which should not be considered as fragmented elements or elements linked together with the help of contrievances that are not natural but imaginary or artificial.

All the principles enunciated in the various chapters are nothing but means aiming at bringing this union between the individual self and the Supreme to complete fruition. For this, man is to embark on a course of spiritual discipline guided by the injunctions of the Śāstras, the Scriptures; for, the obedience to the principles enunciated therein will enable him to control his own nature and lead a life free from attachment. This behaviour will give him the peace of mind and tranquillity indispensable for a deeper enquiry into the nature of the Universe and the mystery of the spirit. As Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna :

> "Therefore let the scripture be thy authority for determining what should be done and what should not be done. Knowing what is declared by the rules of the scripture, thou shouldst do thy work in this world". (XVI, 24).

So, the Lord emphatically encourages Arjuna to be respectful of the duties imposed on him by his own caste, the Kṣatriya caste, that of warriors, and not to substract himself to the grim enterprise that is awaiting him.

> "Further having regard for thine own duty, thou shouldst not falter, there exists no greater good for a Kṣatriya than a battle enjoined by duty". (II, 31)

The laws of the Śāstras are the final authority and regard should be paid to them without any hesitation. Only then, will the drive of personal desires be overcome by the knowledge of the right action to be performed in pursuit of the spiritual goal. One who is endowed with the knowledge of the Śāstras is blessed with a clear mind and an unwavering sense of decision. Like other well-known Śāstras, the Gītā offers vital and valuable instructions to many a traveller in the sojourn of his life enabling him to reach his destination. In this light, it is conceivable that the Lord mentions the yoga of emancipation since it may be considered without any vestige of doubt as the perfection of union between the individual soul and the Supreme; but, when, in the first chapter, the yoga considered there is one of dejection or depression, then it seems rather far-fetched. How can the reader or the listener, endowed with his limited power of judgment conceive of a link between the noblest goal of human life and such a pitiful condition as that of mental depression? Still, if any authority is awarded to the sacred text of the Gītā, it cannot be simply overlooked that the first notes of the Divine Song are heard on a battle-field and, therefore, it must be accepted and subsequently realised that depression or dejection also is a yoga in its own right as the removal of this darkness is an essential step in the direction towards spiritual realization.

Once again, the grim imagery of the battle-field comes to the mind with all its power and movement, and in this setting, the desperate condition of Arjuna touches the heart. Arjuna passes through a great tension. The opposing armies are drawn in battle array and the flight of missiles is about to commence. Arjuna surveys the armies on either side and he realises immediately that the battle means the total destruction of moral values, of law and order, of the great ideals of race and family. What is most painful is to fight with the teacher under whose training he has turned out to be the most illustrious archer of his time. No, he cannot fight, however noble the cause may be. He shrinks. The bow falls from his hand and he takes his seat completely senseless and non-plussed.

The distress of Arjuna is a dramatization of a perpetualy recurring predicament. Man, on the threshold of a higher life, feels disappointed with the glamorous world and still illusions of personal comforts and attachments cling to him. He becomes forgetful of his own divine heritage and he is overpowered by his personality and as his mind stands at the frontier of the two worlds, he has to fight hard with the enemies of egoism, ignorance and greed. It is only when he is determined to do the same through his submission to the advice of an enlightened being, in whatever form, that he is expected to be restored to his pristine nature.

The story of the Gītā is, therefore, the story of the evolution of the human soul which, in the beginning of its pursuit, is beset with indecision and vacillation consequent on its attachment to the familiar conditions amidst which it has developed its personality, marked by the sense-impressions and the mental recollections that stand in the way of his clear vision of the Goal. It is only as the result of arduous practice and serious enquiry that it may be blessed with the vision of the Transcendent after a disciplined movement under the benign guidance of a teacher who has realised the Truth or inspired by the teachings of great Souls of the present age or of days gone by who are the embodiment of Truth itself. "Learn that by humble reverence, by inquiry and by service. The men of wisdom who have seen the truth will instruct thee in knowledge." (IV, 34)

The Gītā possesses a melody of its own and it would be doing injustice to such a great work if an attempt were made to sum up the ideas strewn along the preceding pages. Rather, in way of conclusion, some light may be thrown on the meaning of the title of the work itself and on its implications for the unfoldment of the various chapters contained therein.

The Gītā has been called an Upaniṣad, but, it may be asked why this Upaniṣad was sung by the Lord and not dictated or simply delivered as a piece of instruction to Arjuna. Its very name shows that it was sung as its etymological meaning is "The Song of the Lord." Kṛṣṇa is the Lord; and, as such, he is the perfection of wisdom, and he sings a poem which is all rhythm and truth. Arjuna, who is in a distressed condition listens carefully and gradually finds great comfort and solace in listening to the melodious words of his divine companion. He is soothed and he is restored to his normal condition at the close of the rhythmic recitation. This description is by no means fortuitous as it must be stated that the Vedic seer of yore had realized that "ṛta", rhythm, is the fountain-head of all manifestations. The Divine, as Source of all that comes into existence, is rhythm and unless there is rhythm there cannot be any melody, beauty or joy. This is Truth par excellence. The Divine is rhythm and Truth. In the Song of the Gītā, its rhythm and Truth penetrate into the human soul which bathes in unconditional and uncaused joy.

Rhythm is the panacea for all that is restlessness and wavering. The Lord knows it and none knows it better than him. He sings in such a way that the maximum effect is produced. At the close of the Poem, does not Arjuna exclaim ?

"Destroyed is my delusion and recognition has been gained by me through Thy grace, O Acyuta. I stand firm with my doubts dispelled. I shall act according to Thy word." (XVIII, 73).

Furthermore, a song is not only a piece of music but it has a burthen of its own to which the singer returns time and again in the course of his delivery. The Gītā's burthen is the liberation of the limited self, its union with the Supreme. It aims at bringing about a perfection of the human soul, a complete recasting of the whole man, a total transfiguration. And the various chapters are the colourful verses giving life to the cardinal teaching of the supreme yoga enshrined in chapter two.

By now, the reader has been swept from the ground of the battle-field. Greatly remote are the firing of missiles and the striking of bells. He has been taken to such a high vantage point that he can see for himself that the battle-field of Kurukṣetra, whether it existed in the past or not, is also and mainly the symbol of chaos. Any state or situation that does not respond or conform to the laws of harmony and beauty can be called a battle. And in this context, Arjuna, who is the personification of the human soul yearning after peace and harmony, is shocked by what happens in front of his very eyes. His whole being is shaken to its foundations for he fails to understand how his past irreproachable conduct could have landed him in such a predicament. Still the battle is to happen. His heart cries out for help and this sincere appeal is bound to attract a redeeming force, Kṛṣṇa, who has come not to pronounce condemning judgments or to utter vindicative words, to destroy or to punish but to sing, simply to sing, to restore peace and harmony where there was chaos. He has come to the help of one who has called him so as to enable him to perceive the all-pervasive harmony underlying and supporting apparent states of disorder and discord.

How futile they now appear, these intellectual arguments that were advanced at the beginning of the chapter as to the likelihood of reciting so many verses in so short a time! How dry as dust these mental speculations when the human heart is overpowered by the enchanting and loving melody of the Divine Bard !

It is in this spirit that the oft-quoted verse of chapter four is to be understood. "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age." (IV, 8).

The Lord has come not to destroy but to love all and particularly those who long intensely for his presence. Without this love, the Bhagavad Gītā would not have come into existence. In fact, metaphysical enquiry and religious disposition are not two diametrically opposed attitudes but rather one cannot claim to exist without the other. This fusion of the two is the heart and soul of true Vedic philosophy which can only claim its letters patent of nobility if it helps the human soul to discover the Divine within itself.

CHAPTER THREE

Faithful in spirit to the Upaniṣadic tradition, the Bhagavad Gītā has not betrayed its noble heritage either as far as the form is concerned. As in most of the major Upaniṣads, in the Divine Song also, it is the dialogue "saṁvāda" that has been chosen as the most suitable way of expressing this interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Ultimate Reality. Indeed, the mode of verbal interaction has always been a most convenient and amenable form to be grasped by the human mind. The power of the word acquires more dynamism as it involves the reader directly or indirectly when it presents to his mind the nectarine extract of the wordless experience. As the fruit of the fig-tree ripens on its branches, it exudes some pearly drops of exquisite savour but does not reveal its inner core, so also the dialogue gives to the reader or to the listener a faint but suggestive enough idea of the treasure concealed in its very heart. Moreover, the choice of the dialogue is in direct keeping with the pure philosophical tradition of the East. In this way, it is clearly postulated who is to be the teacher of the highest knowledge and what are his attributes and who should be the student, the fit receptacle for such an experience and what are the conditions to be fulfilled by him.

The realization of the identity of the individual self with the Supreme is an unfathomable experience that can hardly lend itself to any mode of expression. But, still, its import is to be communicated for the benefit of humanity and for the purpose of evolution and, in this context, the dialogue seems to be the fittest means of giving a gradual yet precise idea of the unfoldment of the Supreme Secret. The originality of this form of expression lies in the dynamic movement created between the two or more protagonists of a dialogue, intimately linked to one another by the creative force of the Verb. And, when the dialogue takes place between a divine teacher and his faithful disciple, as in the case of the Bhagavad Gītā, then, it acquires a rhythm and a momentum of its own. By its mere coming into existence, it elevates the protagonists to the rank of living repositories of divine knowledge and, at the same time, it raises the level of consciousness of those who come into contact with these words either by reading or repeating them or simply by listening to them. The divine teacher, Kṛṣna, himself, professes this truth as epilogue of the Poem. (XVIII,67-71).

Yet, before analyzing the form of the dialogue specific to the Bhagavad Gītā, it would be worthwhile coming back once again to the substance of the discussions found in the Upaniṣadic literature. After all, the object of these discussions, namely the interplay between the Transcendent and the Immanent as two facets of one Reality has been the corner-stone of Vedic philosophical thought. In one form or another, the Upaniṣads always discuss the Brahman or Transcendent Principle, the creation and the empirical self. The latter two are concepts readily grasped by the human intellect but the former reigns beyond the realm of ordinary understanding and mental speculation yet being the source and support of both. This is why the Upaniṣadic wisdom does not discard the phenomenal world with all its implications but views it rather in the context of a wider and inscrutable reality enveloping them and giving them the light of life. Obviously, the empirical self is to be understood in its proper perspective. It is, indeed, the beholder of the created world in its multitudinous facets and, in general, it fails to discover the unity pervading the multiple phenomena and thus becomes forgetful of its own nature as divine principle. Yet, the reality of the empirical self and the created world cannot be denied but whether this reality is an empirical one only or whether it has an ulterior value is to be investigated. And, here, the teachings of the Bhagavad Gītā are priceless treasures. Brahman is the Transcendent Principle, but, for the purpose of evolution, a Creator is required to be conceived and this Creator must be one who is not inert and dead matter. Hence, the relation between this creating Agency and the Transcendent Reality, which is behind the created manifestation is to be investigated. A powerful God as the Creator of the world, has been conceived in different religions but should the investigation stop there or should the Creator be looked upon both as immanent and transcendent? It is the quest of this Transcendent One which is the province of Brahmavidyā. When the Transcendent One becomes immanent, the implication is that the One unfolds into many, by virtue of māyā-śakti, its creative power. But the unity may be discovered in the multiplicity. As the well known mantra in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad so poetically chants:

> "From non-being, lead me to being. From darkness, lead me to light. From death, lead me to deathlessness."

In this sense, the world and the empirical self which are the products of māyā-śakti are as illusory as māyā-śakti itself as they both flow out of the Brahman that is pure Consciousness. Viewed as Transcendent Reality, the Brahman is pure Consciousness and considered as Immanent Reality, it is called "Bhagavān", the Lord of the conscious world.

The conception of "avatāra," divine incarnation, therefore is vitally connected with the immanence of the Ultimate Reality. While the Transcendent is called "Nirguṇa Brahman" the Immanent is "Saguṇa Brahman" and the latter in turn is considered in its triple aspect as Brahmā, the creator, Viṣṇu, the protector and Śiva, the destroyer. When it is considered from the aspect of power attached to this triple function, then it is the Mother aspect, the Śakti aspect of the Transcendent that is invoked. But in no way should it be considered as separate from the Transcendent Reality. Or, if according to some schools of Indian philosophy, it is considered as a distinct reality, then it is said to exist eternally in parallel with the Transcendent.

The heart of Upaniṣadic wisdom is the concentration of all the human faculties on the attainment of this Transcendent One, thereby rendering illusory everything that is not this Ultimate Reality. When the attention is focused on one goal, it cannot consider real any t her goal at that point in time. It is in this light that the famous Upaniṣadic story of the rope being mistaken for a snake is to be understood. It is not that one replaces the other in the human mind but it is rather an intuitive discovery of the reality of the rope having been mistaken so long for a snake out of pure ignorance. This simple example serves also as an illustration of the interplay between the transcendent and the immanent aspects of the Ultimate Reality. No better mode of expression than the dialogue could have been chosen to make patent this profound and silent wisdom. Indeed, this interplay eludes every attempt of demonstration or explanation. It is to be experienced intuitively in the cave of the heart. It is by an arduous course of dialectical attitude and philosophical rigour that the Upaniṣadic teachings take the human mind to such Elysian heights that it looses all its power of reasoning and it can only surrender in all humility to the bright Light shining within. The indirect rendering of the dialogue by a third party aims precisely at showing to the reader that the intuitive experience is wordless and can no longer be the object of a verbal interaction between two identities. In those privileged moments, the two protagonists of a sacred dialogue merge into one in the profound silence of Brahman and it is for the reporter then to relate with the help of unsatisfactory expressions the contents of the experience as in the case of the eleventh chapter of the Gītā aptly entitled "The Lord's transfiguration". A brief review of the main Upaniṣads will be an excellent illustration of this point.

In the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, probably one of the most poetic and suggestive Vedānta treatises, the dialogue occurs between Yama, the God of death or rather the prime controller of human destiny and Naciketas, the young bramacārin still untainted by the desires of this world. He has been sent to the God of death under the command of his own father who was to perform a sacrifice.

In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, one is in the presence of several dialogues. This masterpiece of Vedāntic thought has been considered by many scholars as the greatest Upaniṣad not only in size but also in content and it has been the object of a remarkable commentary by Śaṅkara. Here, sage Yājñavalkya offers to divide all his earthly possessions between his two wives, Kātyāyamī and Maitreyī. The latter asks him if by acquiring these possessions she would free herself from death and upon receiving a negative reply from her hushand she refuses all the riches of the world. Commending the spiritual attitude of his wife, the sage proceeds to teach her the great truth of Vedānta. Later in the text, Yājñavalkya is to impart knowledge to king Janaka, his greatest householder disciple, who came to him desirous of knowing the Truth without having to renounce the world.

In the Praśna Upaniṣad which derives its name from the six "praśnas", questions, it contains, the philosophical problems are discussed through the medium of a dialogue between six students and sage Pippalāda. These students are genuine seekers after the Ultimate Truth and they have approached the enlightened preceptor in the true Vedic tradition. The questions put by them serve to reveal the Truth, from its grossest aspects to its subtlest ones.

In the Kena Upaniṣad, the Ultimate Reality is seen as the origin, the ground and the goal of the manifold manifestation. Here, it is Umā who imparts this spiritual knowledge to the gods who in a moment of self-conceit thought that they were all-powerful. The goddess Umā, in divine compassion, opened their eyes by imparting the right knowledge.

Whereas in most of the Upaniṣads, the teacher is either an illumined being or a god of the elements, in the Bhagavad Gītā it is an incarnation of the Lord who plays the role of a spiritual guide. In the Lord's Song, it is Kṛṣṇa who is regarded as the immanent God-head. He is, according to the Purāṇas, the Supreme incarnation of Nārāyaṇa and, as such, he cannot be considered as a mere symbol of the Transcendent Reality but, rather, as the repository, true and living, of Brahmavidyā. On the occasion of the Kurukṣetra war, he chose to impart this divine knowledge to his beloved devotee and life companion, Arjuna. Thanks to his untiring efforts, his unflinching faith and his pure heart, the latter had made himself fit to receive this sacred treasure. According to Paurāṇic sources, Arjuna is also considered as an incarnation but a partial one and therefore he can be considered as the perfect human repository of Yoga-śāstra. In essence, the two are one. It is said that for many lives past, they had been associated in their quest after the Ultimate Reality and once, they even came on earth as the incarnations of Nara and Nārāyaṇa practising penance on two mountain tops facing each other in the Himalayan range at a place where now exists the holy sanctuary of Badrīnātha. But it is their differences on the plane of manifestation that are necessary to give birth to the divine dialogue. Certainly, Kṛṣṇa is the supreme God-head, the central figure of the divine Poem, the creator of the nectarine verses, the propounder of the sacred teaching but were it not for Arjuna's inquisitive mind, combative nature and loving heart, the divine personality of Kṛṣṇa would have had no occasion to manifest itself in this context. If the battle-field was the occasion for the dialogue it can be said that it is the personality of Arjuna which is the occasion for the manifestation of the Transcendent Principle in the human locus of Kṛṣṇa in the context of this event. Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna can by no means be considered as mere symbols of the highest Truth. They are the two powerful poles of a unique rhythm that unites them both in their common journey to the goal. The one being permanently installed in the blissful state of realization pulls the other nearer to him in a graduated and harmonious movement and as more and more of the path is covered jointly, Arjuna loses all his mental confusion and is slowly filled with the delight oozing out of Kṛṣṇa's words. The powerful impact of the divine dialogue already existed in seed-form in the imminent battle of Kurukṣetra but it needed the blessed encounter of the two protagonists to manifest itself.

Besides, the etymological meaning of the two names is very significant. The word "Kṛṣṇa" comes from the root "kṛṣ", to pull and "-ṇa", to fill with delight. And, this is exactly Kṛṣṇa's role on the scene of the fierce battle. He has come to pull his beloved Arjuna out of the state of bewilderment and confusion into which he has fallen and to fill him up with the soothing light of knowledge and the everlast-

ing life of the spirit. To the compassionate words of Kṛṣṇa heard at the beginning of the Poem :
"Whence has come to thee this stain of spirit in this hour of crisis ?"
Arjuna bluntly retorts "I will not fight" (II,9)
But, in the closing chapter, there is a complete reversal of the situation and Arjuna is heard proclaiming "Destroyed is my delusion...I shall act according to Thy word." (XVIII, 73)

The name 'Arjuna' means white, the symbol of absolute purity. Indeed, Arjuna is to make his mind and heart as white as the pure lily flower if he is to become the shining receptacle of Brahmavidyā imparted by Kṛṣṇa. Every trace of "tamas", inertia and "rajas ', aggressivity, the two lower modes of nature are to be eliminated completely. He is to abide in a state of spotless purity so that he may reflect faithfully the teachings of his divine master, the Lord, the "Bhagavān".

The Bhāgavata Purāṇa describes Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān and states that while other incarnations of the Lord were only partial ones, the Kṛṣṇa incarnation is the most perfect one and the most sublime. The sense of the word "Bhagavān" is possessor of "bhaga" which is an aggregate of six qualities : lordship, strength, renown, prosperity, wisdom and unattachment brought to their perfection. These attributes can never leave him, they are associated with him for ever. It is, therefore, to be seen how an historical personality may be identified with the Supreme. The answer to this paradox may be found in the extant literature of the Ṛg Veda and the Upaniṣads where it has been frequently said that the awakened soul that has shaken off its limitations realises that he is no other than the Absolute. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad states "The worshipper becomes one with God."

The human soul with all its limitations may be expanded and uplifted so that it becomes divine. The contact or union with the Divine brings out the latent divinity in man and the latter is raised to the level of the former. Now, it should be noted that as the human soul may be identified with the Divine if it strives after it, so also, the Divine may find its expression in the human frame if he so chooses. The Divine may descend at his own sweet will, "svecchā", but the descent of the Infinite as the finite "avatāra" does not substract or add anything to the integrity of the Divine though he assumes a human nature in a body. Of course, the incarnation of the Lord as a human being does not reveal his personality in naked glory. He lives and moves as a normal human being. Besides, the Lord is Compassion. Though eternally blissful, he still knows all that is human limitation, hunger and thirst, sorrow and suffering but he does not remain a passive and indifferent onlooker. He acts. He shows the way of combating evil tendencies and he asks the human being to draw inspiration from his own conduct. Before his resplendent and overpowering personality, the forces of evil, corruption, selfishness and ignorance take to their heels. And it is for Arjuna to discover the identity of this incarnation in the person of his cousin and draw the necessary inspiration from his life and teachings so that he, in turn, may act in the right way.

Historically speaking, Kṛṣṇa was born to Vasudeva and Devakī in a cell of the prison house of king Kaṁsa at Mathurā; he was immediately taken to the residence of Nanda, ruler of the kingdom of Vṛndāvana on the other bank of the Jamunā. This is where he spent the early years of his life until he returned to the capital to kill Kaṁsa who had usurped the throne and to restore Ugrasena to kingship. But who is this child born to Vasudeva ? The newly-born did not look like an ordinary infant. He had an extraordinary appearance and as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa describes it, it was something wonderful and out of the ordinary. Its eyes were as beautiful as the petals of the lotus, with four hands carrying a conch, a discus, a mace and a lotus. On seeing his mother in a state of bewilderment, this supernatural child explained to Devakī that he came to her as her son in previous lives also. Indeed, after having performed hard penance, Devakī and her husband were blessed with the vision of the Lord who asked them to pray for a boon. They expressed the desire of having a son worthy of his stature. The Lord went on to say to Devakī that he had granted the boon and as he could not find anyone to match him, he came himself to them as their son when he was known by the name of Pṛśnigarbha. He came a second time when he was called Upendra or Vāmana. And on this occasion, he came for a third time in order to remind her of his promise. This is why he appeared to her in the extraordinary form with four hands before resuming his normal human appearance. Kṛṣṇa is certainly described as a mortal with two hands but he was also incarnated as a form of Nārāyaṇa with four hands, symbolic of his powers of protection extending over the four quarters of the Universe.

In the context of the battle of Kurukṣetra, he enlightens his devotee in a manner that would enable the latter to be used as an instrument for the fulfilment of his divine sport. The battle, therefore, is not so much meant for the destruction of evil forces as much as for restoring order and harmony through such destruction. The emphasis is placed on the restoration of order rather than on the eradication of evil. Establishment of balance and harmony is the ultimate goal to be reached. The Lord incarnates himself to see that the ultimate objective is reached and that ostacles and difficulties are removed. The purpose of the Lord, coming down as an avatāra is that faith in the upliftment of the human soul is redeemed. In this spirit, Kṛṣṇa reminds Arjuna of his former incarnations and of his association with him in previous births. He tells him that although it is natural for himself to be aware of this, it may not be so for Arjuna with his limited power of memory-knowledge. Indeed Kṛṣṇa as Arjuna's charioteer appears to be one not in any way distinguishable from a human being but it is not so. He is an incarnation of Lord Nārāyaṇa and, as such, he is the Primeval Being out of which the universe manifests itself. The Transcendent one is beyond time and space but as far as creation is concerned, the evolution, preservation and annihilation of the universe are explained through the immanent aspects of the Transcendent. Kṛṣṇa repeatedly impresses upon his disciple that he is omnipresent and omnipotent but it is difficult for Arjuna to understand and appreciate this idea. It therefore became necessary for the Lord to bestow upon Arjuna the power of inner vision so that his cosmic form may be revealed to him. As is admirably described in chapter eleven, Arjuna was favoured with an all-embracing vision of the cosmic form of the Lord in its multitudinous facets but it was too much to behold for an ordinary mortal; he could not stand the test of this extraordinary favour and as he succumbed again to the innate weakness of his nature, he fell on his knees and prayed to the Lord to be blessed with the vision of his form as Nārāyaṇa, the Lord with four arms, the Protector, the Saviour and Support of this universe. This form, as in the case of Devakī, is also familiar to Arjuna since Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had been associated in previous lives as incarnations of Nara and Nārāyaṇa. But in this birth, Arjuna is only a mortal being and so it is quite natural that when the cosmic form of the

Lord appeared to him, he was completely dazed and he longed to find the peace of mind in the vision of a form which was soothing and comforting.

But the Bhagavad Gītā throws further light on the relationship between the cosmic form and the Transcendent by stating that Kṛṣṇa is all. Kṛṣṇa is Akṣara Brahman, he is the very seat of Brahman (chapter XIV). He is the ubiquitous principle which is none other than the Transcendent One. Kṛṣṇa is both in one single identity. Kṛṣṇa, the charioteer, the great dynamic principle that governs all our activities is indistinguishable from what is described as the Transcendent. In Kṛṣṇa, a sublime and consummate fusion of Cosmos and Transcendence is to be found.

A careful and methodical examination of the Poem will show how the dynamic interaction of the divine teacher and his human disciple will bring about the complete unfolding of the "Supreme Secret" and the revelation of Kṛṣṇa's omnipresence.

For the third time in these pages, the reader is brought back to the battle-field to focus his attention on the subtle articulation of the successive parts of the divine song. It is for the reader to realize in his heart how this mysterious interplay between Transcendence and Immanence is presented before his very eyes in a flash-back retracing succintly the intellectual movements and emotional outbursts of the disciple and the counteracting measures taken by the divine teacher. Unremittingly and forcefully, the Lord strives to bring his disciple back on the right path until he finally attains total victory over the forces of helusion and darkness.

It was on the field of righteousness, the field of the Kurus, "dharmakṣetre Kurukṣetre" (I.1) that Arjuna, the brave warrior, gave way to weakness and self-pity as he was surveying the two armies. His emotional upset prompted him to give a brilliant intellectual argumentation in defence of his own position. This was the moment chosen by Kṛṣṇa to intervene and sternly reprove Arjuna for his behaviour (II.2). Arjuna reacted violently to this rebuke and categorically decided not to fight (II.9). Stirred by his companion's despondency, Kṛṣṇa undertakes to interpret the philosophy of Sāṁkhya and that of Yoga for him (chapter two). This brilliant exposition pulls Arjuna out of his apathetic slumber and inspires him to put a question of a general nature about the characteristics of a man of wisdom (II.52), thereby allowing Kṛṣṇa to rise above the specificity of the occasion. By the time chapter three begins, Arjuna's attention has been entirely captivated by Kṛṣṇa's words and he expresses a doubt of intellectual nature about the opportunity of reconciling the way of knowledge with the performance of such a cruel action enjoined to him by Kṛṣṇa. (III.1) This gives the master the platform to enunciate the rudiments of the two-fold way, one of reflection and one of selfless action, to be adopted according to each one's capacites (III.3). But, in this global picture, Kṛṣṇa never fails to consider Arjuna's particular case and he therefore declares that it is better to follow one's own law even imperfectly rather than to borrow someone else's standards (III. 35). Nevertheless, Arjuna continues to be troubled by the notion of sin (III.37) and he admits his confusion to Kṛṣṇa who embarks again on a general discussion about the way of righteous action thereby disclosing the "Supreme Secret" (chapter three). But Arjuna whose mind is still veiled by ignorance fails to understand the import of Kṛṣṇa's message and in all candor he puts a question about the chronology of events (IV. 4). This prompts Kṛṣṇa to reveal his true nature as an incarnation, the purpose of his coming on earth and the desireless nature of his work (chapter four). The compassionate essence of the Lord is likewise unveiled when he states that he accepts all who come to him, whatever their degree of devotion may be (IV.11). Far from limiting himself to a theoretical exposition of the path, Kṛṣṇa never fails to encourage Arjuna with clear and loving guidance. At this critical juncture, his advice is of a particular nature as he practically enjoins Arjuna to become his disciple (IV.34).

By now, Arjuna has surrendered to the greatness of his master's words; he has been able to discriminate between the two ways and he asks which is the best (V.1). Kṛṣṇa answers that both ways lead to salvation but if one is to be considered superior to the other then it is the path of selfless action which is to be adopted (V.2), although, in ultimate analysis, for the wise there is no difference between the two (V.5).

By showing how selfless action and metaphysical reflection are fused into one another by devotion to the Supreme One, Kṛṣṇa, for the first time alludes to the Triune Path (chapters five and six). On his part, Arjuna, as if reborn, devotes himself to an exercise of self-reflection, recognizing the limitations imposed on him by nature (V. 33-4).

Henceforward, it is the disciple in him who acts, he has come closer to his Lord by admitting his limitations and the reward is immediate: Kṛṣṇa starts instructing Arjuna in the practical way of controlling the mind by constant practice and non-attachment (VI.35). Confident in his guide, Arjuna gives expression to his fears (VI. 37-8) and he begs of Kṛṣṇa to dispel his doubt completely (VI.39). More than ever before, the loving nature of Kṛṣṇa makes itself felt now as he comforts his disciple by giving him an illustration that allays his fears. (VI. 40-7).

It is interesting to note that this part of the dialogue conludes the first six chapters dedicated to karma-yoga. Arjuna has understood intellectually the way of selfless action, by his attitude he has proved that he can become a worthy disciple and he is now fit to be initiated into the mysteries of bhakti-yoga. The way is no longer two-fold but three-fold (VII. 7). It is a Triune Path and this is the way to know the Lord in full. This is the assurance that Kṛṣṇa gives to his disciple in chapter seven. He unveils his higher and lower nature, exposing māyā as the root cause of ignorance and confusion in man and praising the qualities of the Lord's devotees amongst whom the wise bear the marks of excellency. Arjuna is now diving deep into the subject matter of Upaniṣadic teaching and he wants to know more about the interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the One (VIII. 1). This inspires Kṛṣṇa to display the course of cosmic evolution, showing the interconnectedness between the Imperishable and its manifestation on all planes (chapter eight). Kṛṣṇa declares that only the yogin knows these paths and he can never be deluded. He therefore exhorts Arjuna not only to be a disciple but to be a yogin, to strive for union with the Lord in the all-powerful action of devoted love (VIII. 27).

It is to be noticed that, except for the question he puts at the beginning of chapter eight, Arjuna has been listening to the Lord's words with rapt attention and in an attitude of respectful silence. He intervenes in chapter ten again, not to put a question this time but to utter words of praise and admiration for Kṛṣṇa. All along, Kṛṣṇa had been giving detailed and vivid descriptions of the nature and essence of the God-head, slowly arousing the feeling of devotion in Arjuna's heart so that he may be ready for the moment of supreme revelation. The description of his powerful nature is certainly impressive but Kṛṣṇa has been moved by Arjuna's sincere love and at the close of chapter ten, he tells him in a simple and unostentatious way that there is no need for him to know all this if he can realize that it is only with a fragment of himself that the Lord supports the entire universe (X. 42). Arjuna confesses that he has been touched by grace and he prays the Lord to reveal his divine form to him if he deems his disciple worthy of it (XI. 1-4). These words prove that Arjuna has realized that no amount of philosophical speculation would bring him closer to the goal. He is to wait for the descent of grace : this is the consecration of bhakti-yoga. Arjuna felt anxious to be blessed with the vision of the Lord as the one identity encompassing the whole universe. He failed to understand how the Lord could be the locus of the multitudinous objects of all the worlds and how again he could be without a beginning, a middle and an end. But the Lord responded to the quell of anxiety of his beloved devotee and bestowed upon him the supernatural eye to behold the Divine, as he was not competent enough to see it with his own power. As a result of this, ignorance took leave of Arjuna. At the outset, he was delighted to see the divine form but gradually he entered into a state of tremor as Kṛṣṇa showed him his all-devastating form. So, Arjuna appealed to the Lord to withdraw this terrible aspect and offer him the form which was familiar to his mind (XI. 45-6).

After the momentous revelation of Kṛṣṇa's cosmic form, it would be expected of Arjuna to have come out of duality once for all. This profound experience should have transformed the disciple completely and still the words uttered by Arjuna betray his mental limitations (XII. 1). Certainly, his attitude has changed; his heart has acquired the spotless purity essential to the descent of grace, his emotions have been harnessed by the iron will necessary to move on the spiritual path but his mind fails to cross over the powerful barrier of illusion that cuts man from his own source. This cosmic vision is not the realization of the Lord as the Self, it is the vision of the Lord as an object. On this plane, the One spreads out into the limitless multiplicity and multiplicity is withdrawn into Unity. The manifestation of the universal form is the ultimate expression but so long as the cogniser of the content of cognition remains separate, it is not Supreme Realization. In the Upaniṣads, the Supreme Reality is described as "abhaya", removing all fears, and had Arjuna been blessed with that experience he would not have been terror-stricken. What is still required is the spontaneous dawning of knowledge which will take Arjuna across the empirical plane and will inspire him to fight under the guidance of Kṛṣṇa.

The revelation of the cosmic form to Arjuna is the reward of his unswerving devotion to his Lord and it conludes the part of the Poem dedicated to bhakti-yoga. Arjuna's mind has now come to a state of poise and calm and it has been made the fit receptacle for transcendental knowledge. There is no more vacillation in Arjuna's heart and he prays Kṛṣṇa once again to enlighten him on God, on the nature of the self and on creation. In an all-embracing review of the multiple ways of reaching him, Kṛṣṇa demonstrates the universal character of his teachings and he conlcudes by praising the merit of the Triune Path (XII 2-8, 20). To an inattentive reader, this may seem a redundant exposition but even if the concepts exposed by Kṛṣṇa are the same, the spirit that guides the dialogue has totally changed. The seed of self-knowledge was sown already in chapter two but the ground in which it was destined to grow was not ready. It had to be furrowed by the plough of karma-yoga, all weeds burnt in the fire of bhakti-yoga so that it may give birth to the robust tree of self-knowledge and selfless action. The poetic delivery of chapter fifteen is the culmination of the master's loving guidance and the disciple's untiring efforts. The Lord and his disciple are getting closer to each other to reach a state of perfect identity, were it not for a last quesstion put by Arjuna at the opening of chapter seventeen. In a fitting reply, Kṛṣṇa exhorts Arjuna to adopt the path of total renunciation of the results of his actions, assuring him over and over again that his reward will be Kṛṣṇa himself (XVII. 66). Still, Kṛṣṇa's catholicity of view should not be overlooked as he leaves Arjuna entirely free to act as he chooses. (XVIII. 63). This act of loving freedom can only find an echo in the total surrender of Arjuna when he declares unhesitatingly that he will fight, thereby concluding the divine dialogue (XVIII. 73)

According to the Vedic tradition, the dialogue is a unit of expression composed of questions and related answers which are by no means separate identities. The answer is always to be found in germ in the question, the elucidation of which is only a sequel of what has already been put in the question itself. By answering a question, the teacher seeks to transmit to the disciple a sketch of his teachings and the latter, so inspired, will continue to ask questions until such time as the dialogue reduces itself to complete silence.

Silence has always been considered as the powerful weapon of the ascetic since it is the only means by which he can bring the disciple back to the source of all questions : the eternal, tranquil and luminous state of Unity, which is beyond thoughts and words. It is an all-pervasive Reality that forms an unbroken circle uniting the Divine to the human and allowing the human to be revitalized by the Divine. On the plane of verbal transmission, it takes the form of a dialogue in which the protagonists and the object of their verbal intercourse can be experienced at different levels.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna can be considered as two cousins whose destinies have been united on the battle-field of Kurukṣetra. Or, they can be viewed as the formal symbols of Brahmavidyā and Yogaśāstra. Moreover, the dialogue may be construed as uniting the greatest of human disciples to Kṛṣṇa,the avatāra,in a momentous historical event that happened in a distant past. In this way, many interpretations can be given of the divine dialogue but, ultimately, it will always reflect the inward journey of a spiritual seeker in which the self is in constant interaction with the Divine Principle.

The union of the Divine and the human element is indispensable for the maintenance of the world-order. Indeed, the quality of the created world becomes fully manifested when the Divine is anxious to respond to the requirements of the human and when the latter feels that the reciprocity with the Divine is to be maintained in all fervor. If, on the contrary, the Divine keeps itself away from the human and the human becomes oblivious of the urgency of its contact with the Divine, the whole creation turns out to be a senseless play. In the Vedas and in the Upaniṣads, the celestial and the terrestrial planes are linked to each other as a couple whose union can only produce beneficial results. It is for heaven to reciprocate the activities of man and for man to offer the results of his actions to heaven in the interest of maintaining the world-order.

In this spirit, the dialogue of the Bhagavad Gītā shines out not only as a treasure of philosophical truths and spiritual precepts but also as a powerful instrument of reconciliation between the Divine and the human for the preservation and the stability of the created world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Up to this day, in India and beyond its borders, the spiritual light of the Bhagavad Gītā has been shining unwaveringly for those who are moving on their way to Truth. For many centuries, millions of Hindus have sought refuge in the words of the Divine Teacher and they have found great solace in listening to the melodious utterances of the Lord. In recent times, the Poem has attracted seekers hailing from different cultural backgrounds all over the world and if one were to give a distinctive mark to the Gītā, it would be one of universality. Its message outlives the times in which the occasion for the dialogue is believed to have taken place, its call ranges beyond the two main protagonists who, after all, belonged to a particular religious and cultural background at a given period of history. It is a feat of wonder, therefore, that born in a specific context, heir to a very rich philosophical tradition, the Gītā has outgrown its natural limitations and has flowered into a universal gospel. At the time it is said to have been composed, many religious currents were competing with one other and pre-eminence was given to the path of knowledge or renunciation whereas other paths, like that of devotion, had been relegated to an inferior position. As an incarnation of Truth, Lord Kṛṣṇa was to restore harmony and equilibrium where obscurantism and discord had clouded the clear vision of spiritual Reality. Truth is one but it manifests itself in a myriad of facets and the Gītā is the herald of this unitary vision. The Poem is firmly rooted in Monism, the underlying current of the whole Upaniṣadic tradition and unless this fact is properly understood, the universal character of the work will not be appreciated in full. In an all-embracing synthesis, the divine song blended all disparate elements into a fabric of serene harmonious wisdom. It is a resounding message of Unity where even the seemingly contradictory statements are naturally reconciled.

What is more, Lord Kṛṣṇa, by his extraordinary personality was to revive the current of spiritual devotion and reinstate it in its proper place. This has prompted advocates of the bhakti cult to confine the message of the Gītā to one of worship and adoration of a personal God incarnate, Kṛṣṇa. In such a case, the divine song would be no more than an exposition of the Kṛṣṇa-cult claiming that salvation is awarded only to those seekers who are attached to the divine personality of Kṛṣṇa. But, such a parochial interpretation of the Poem could never hold good in a ground as fertile in universal belief as is Hinduism. Whatever might be the differing views of scholars, the Bhagavad Gītā can never be regarded as a gospel of the Kṛṣṇa-cult, as it is understood in orninary parlance. The Lord himself declares in the Poem that in him rests Brahman (XIV. 27). Kṛṣṇa certainly is a personal God but he is also something more. Has he not chanted that he is ubiquitous, all-embracing and eternal ? And the Lord's song owes its existence to Monism, it finds its culmination in utterances on the Unitary Principle underlying all creation and it resolves itself in the everlasting silence of Brahman. The Gītā, therefore, has been hailed as one of the three "prasthānas"or important branches of study of Indian Monism as found in the Vedāntic literature. The great philosopher Śaṅkara thought it worth-while to dedicate a masterly commentary to the Bhagavad Gītā on the same ground as he wrote commentaries on the aphorisms of Vyāsa and the main Upaniṣads. The divine personality of Kṛṣṇa is thus to be realized not only in its immanent aspect but in its transcendent one also. He is in all, yet he stands beyond all. Immanence, as conceived in the Gītā, does not in any way contradict Transcendence. Kṛṣṇa is the great Cosmos and as he has so potently proved to Arjuna, it is possible for him to exhibit his Immanence before one whom he judges worthy of it

In this context, it is interesting to mention that one of the great masters of monistic Vedānta in recent years, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, describes the Ultimate Truth as transcending all modes and activities but at the same time he expresses his love for a personal God. He describes his favourite one, Kṛṣṇa, as playing on his flute, clad in yellow robes, with his face as dark as the clouds in the rainy season and with his lips as red as a crimson flower. A Vedāntin of the highest order describes Kṛṣṇa as his beloved one and prays that he may be granted the vision of his Lord for all times to come. To all intents and purposes, what he advocates is a case of symbol-worship. But this statement claiming that concentration on the formless principle does not bestow greater peace than the ecstatic vision of a personal God, falls from the lips of an advaitin trained in the rigorous discipline of concentration on the Absolute. It is quite significant, therefore, that when he offers his salutation to the effulgent son of Nanda, the quintessence of all beauty who sets aside the bond of Māyā he refers to Kṛṣṇa as the transcendent in human form. Kṛṣṇa is as much the locus of Māyā, this powerful veil of illusion that covers the Ultimate Truth as he is the Truth itself, the Absolute Brahman. (IV 6, IX 5). He is the most wonderful expression of the Absolute and he is completely identified with it. It is no longer a question of saguṇa brahman or nirguṇa brahman but the Ultimate Reality which transcends both in the locus of Kṛṣṇa. This explains the seemingly contradictory descriptions given of Kṛṣṇa in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. One of the texts shows the divine incarnation as destitute of all attributes, transcending the phenomenal world as the unitary principle, the eternal being, self–luminous and replete with perennial bliss. Yet another text claims that he who serves Kṛṣṇa with unflinching devotion attains to a state beyond the modes and becomes fit for the realization of Brahman. One, therefore, is asked to be a jñāni-bhakta, a perfect blend of knowledge and supreme devotion, one whom the Lord loves most. Only then, is one to realize that Kṛṣṇa is Brahman. The Lord is Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa is the Lord. Bhagavad Gītā, therefore, does not concern itself with a circumscribed field of experience but it unfolds the mystic revelations of an enlightened being. The progressive and harmonious unfoldment is the Triune Path that the spiritual aspirant is invited to follow. The path advocated by Kṛṣṇa is one that leads from a certain degree of harmony to ever increasing harmony until it is brought to its culmination : the harmonious manifestation of the divine will in man. As the majestic eagle soars up from the firmly rooted tree, in like manner the Lord's message had to be imbued with the profound mystical wisdom of Monism in order to acquire such an everlasting resonance. Rhythm and sound, like the outstrecthed wing of the gliding bird, fashioned the divine dialogue out of the illusion-clad silence of Brahman. As long as the Lord's will does not manifest itself, all is shrouded in silence. But, when the Lord is presented with a situation of chaos, then the perfect cosmos that he is must appear to draw to his side the forlorn sojourners. He guides them along a path which will ultimately allow them to merge in the eternal state of Brahman. This is the state of supreme realization, the goal to be reached at the apex of a life inspired by Truth.

Brahman, the One, is ever existent and it reigns beyond all that is accessible to the human intellect. For the purpose of creation and evolution, it unfolded itself into the many with the help of its own creative power. The one needed instruments to enact the play it had set forth and in which it could reflect itself. All created beings are his instruments and, as such they partake of his nature. (IX. 4). But in the whole of creation, man alone has been equipped with the necessary means to play his part intelligently yet remaining conscious of the indissoluble link that attaches him to the One. By dint of austere asceticism and through his power of intuition, the Vedic seer had aready discovered this indescribable "memory-link" burried deeply in the heart of man that kept him in constant touch with his own divine nature. One of the oldest hymns of the Ṛg Veda on creation already presents, in a mysterious and mystical language, the truths propounded later by Kṛṣṇa. It describes the state before creation as "darkness shrouded in darkness" where "that One alone breathed windless by itself" until, through the power of tapas, the One arose and the first fruit of his mind was Kāma, love and in this love "the wise searching in their hearts, have by meditation discovered the connection between the existing and the non-existing" (RV. X. 129). As transcendent reality, the One is beyond all modes of creation but as immanent principle, he is the essence of all that exists and in man he is "manhood" (VII. 8).

The path of yoga or union is the return to this unfathomable source of man's being. It is the answer to the divine call heard in the cave of the heart; it is the transfiguration of the human personality into the supreme state of being. And, the Bhagavad Gītā gives a vivid account of this homeward journey along the Triune Path. Nevertheless, in some verses of the divine song, Kṛṣṇa seems to imply that he accepts all as plants to his fold whatever may be the paths followed by them (IV. 11). Moreover, each chapter of the Gītā has been called a yoga. This would seem that, on the one hand, the Gītā advocates a plurality of ways and, on the other hand, it pleads in favour of a Triune Path. Is this contradiction a reality or a mere appearance ? As it is true to envisage an infinite variety of modes of contact with the Ultimate Reality, it is equally valid to claim the existence of a unique Path which is all-embracing in nature. As the traveller can only have a full view of the ground he has covered during his journey once he reaches the summit, likewise, the ways which seemed many, ultimately resolve into one when spiritual wisdom dawns. What is termed yoga in the context of the various chapters of the Gītā corresponds to the particular condition in which the disciple finds himself at that particular stage of his spiritual journey. Yoga, in this case, means a particular point on the way. And, if the path is really a path, it must be linked to the goal from the very incipient stage and it naturally follows that each point on the path is a unique, specific point of contact with the goal.

It is for the spiritual master, for the realized being to lead the seeker gradually from multiplicity to the state of trinity and then to the fusion of trinity into unity. The Lord himself indicates this way to Arjuna (IV. 34). Through a process of steadfast and devoted concentration on the goal of his life, the seeker will come to realize that the master who, at first, seemed to be waiting for him at the destination, has become his inner guide, the intimate friend who is present and active at every moment of the journey. It is only when the aspirant fixes all his faculties on the Lord, in supreme absorption, that the working of illusion comes to an end and that he discovers that the Lord is all that exists. This is an inner happening a rhythmic flowering of the identity of the embodied self which can only occur with the working of divine grace. When the Lord is all, when he is described as blissful, loving, omniscient and omnipresent, why do men turn a deaf ear to his call ? Why do they wander aimlessly instead of treading on the path indicated by the Lord ?

This human erring is due to the play of māyā that acts according to the Lord's will in a two-fold way : it veils an identity and does not allow it to appear as such or it exhibits the identity as different from what it really is (VII. 25). In truth, since the dawn of creation man has been worshipping various divinities instead of approaching the Lord directly. His mind, distorted by conflicting desires, has led him to resort to different gods in the expectation that his prayers may be fulfilled (VII. 20). The Lord in his infinite compassion, has confirmed that faith of man and has granted him the rewards he sought (VII. 21).

Indeed, any form of sincere worship helps man to progress towards Truth. Since all forms are his forms, their worship is his worship, the dispenser of all rewards being himself and no body else (VII. 22). Understandably, in the initial stage, the Lord cannot be comprehended, either in the saguṇa form or in the nirguṇa form. The forms imposed on the Lord are nothing, but imaginary constructions due to human limitations through the working of māyā. If, however, māyā acts according to his will, it is only natural that the Lord should be approached for the purpose of escaping from the clutches of māyā (VII. 14). The world is the product of an illusion that binds our intellectual activities and unless it is overcome, wisdom cannot be gained. At every step of his journey, man is given the option of realizing this Truth and the Bhagavad Gītā gives the clarion call for the seeker to set out on his spiritual pilgrimage. Thus, Lord Kṛṣṇa enlightens Arjuna on the method of transcending the limits of phenomenal nature and going beyond his own limitations yet remaining active and performing his duties. This method, the Triune Path, is a perfect blend of karma, bhakti and jñāna yoga, addressed to the human personality as a whole.

Human nature, as such, is governed by the power of reason and its movements are influenced by the play of the three guṇas, the fluctuating qualities of cosmic energy (III. 28, VII. 12, XIV. 5). The three qualities of purity, activity and inertia are found in varying proportions in every individual and in the course of evolution of the embodied self, different stages are experienced with a preponderance of one or the other of these qualities. Spiritual practice aims at developing the quality of purity in the aspirant so that he may be in a condition of ultimately transcending the empirical plane. Once this is achieved, the individual is no longer swayed by the modes of nature and his identity with Brahman becomes manifest. This state of "guṇātīta", of one who has transcended the modes, (XIV. 24-5) is identical to the one of "sthita-prajña", evoked by Lord Kṛṣṇa at the beginning of chapter two. For one who is blessed with the vision of the Unity underlying all phenomena, the difference between separate identities and opposing qualities vanishes for ever. But, this wisdom does not spring from any academic pursuit. It does not come in the wake of modal knowledge assisted by the senses. Modal knowledge at best will enable man to discriminate between pairs of opposites, like gain and loss, happiness and sorrow, victory and defeat. But the Lord impresses upon Arjuna that these apparently contradictory terms are to be equated as identical to the One, the Brahman, and he explains to his disciple the various facets of the Triune Path that will lead him to the summum bonum of his life.

Traditionally, karma and jñāna were held to be the two paths leading to "niḥśreyas", the ultimate good. The Vedic hymns proclaimed the identity of the one who performed sacrifices according to the injunctions of the Śāstras and the one who understood the purpose of these ritualistic practices, stating that both would obtain the same result. In the Vedic literature and particularly in the Brāhmaṇa literature in which are included the Upaniṣads, an attitude of compromise between jñāna and karma has always been upheld. This is the lesson that Kṛṣṇa wanted to impart to Arjuna but the latter failed to seize the import of such a profound teaching (III. 3). In the context of a bloody battle, Arjuna failed to find any logic in pursuing the path of works. At that particular moment, acting for Arjuna would have meant to kill his fellow-beings and he refused to accept the fact that the Lord wanted him to behave in such a ruthless manner. Yet, Kṛṣṇa was adamant and he enjoined Arjuna to perform his duty in an unattached way (XI. 34).

In chapter two of the Poem the paths of karma and jñāna are presented to Arjuna simultaneously but, neither of them seems to help him out of his predicament. Arjuna is to face a very stressing situation and no amount of philosophical discussion about the eternity of the Self will convince Arjuna about the righteousness of the situation. Kṛṣṇa's order to fight has no effect either on the person of his disciple. What, then, is the missing element that will reunite action and knowledge ? It is the disinterested devotion to the Lord, to the Self which is at the root of true action and which is the inspiration for the attainment of supreme knowledge. Without bhakti, devotional love, neither karma nor jñāna can produce beneficial results.

In reality, true action can only be performed when one nurtures sincere love for the Lord in one's heart. The way of selfless action or karma-yoga is inspired by bhakti-yoga. Bhakti-yoga, in its turn, is not simply a blind faith uniting the devotee to his Lord but it is a belief made radiant by the keen awareness of the nature of such devotion. This selfless attachment that inspires the devotee to offer all the results of his actions to the Lord is pure renunciation or jñāna. The second, third and fourth chapters of the Gītā, therefore, lay the foundation of the entire structure of the Poem.

The performance of selfless action cannot happen in a day. It is the outcome of an arduous course of practice, self-discipline and discrimination. Indifference to empirical results is not to be treated as a negative concept. Detachment is only another name for attachment to the Supreme One. The practice of yoga is not a process in which all the activities of the mind are to be stopped. In ancient India, the system of yoga started with the enunciation that yoga is the control of mental activity but such a control has no meaning in the absolute sense of the word. Controlling the activities of the mind without allowing it to produce any result is certainly not yoga. The cessation of mental activity is not the ultimate aim, it is only a way of allowing the mind to be fully concentrated on the Lord. (IV. 10, V. 17, VI 14, 47). Moreover, Kṛṣṇa assures Arjuna that when his mind will become fully concentrated, he will feel that there is nothing left for him to do but that all that happens is a manifestattion of the Lord's will since he pervades all that exists. In this state of perfect equanimity, the dawning of the Self will happen and there will ensue a spontaneous offering of the results of one's actions to the Lord. The yoga of the Gītā is not a process of mental self-torture, austere physical penance or frustrated love but it is a full blossoming of the human personality allowing the Divine to take full possession of it for his own purpose. With the performance of enlightened action, it is no longer the circumscribed self who acts but the Universal Self. Whatever is experienced in that state relates to the Lord who permeates the multiple manifestatians of this creation of his (VI. 30, XIII. 28-9)

In the ultimate analysis, bhakti-yoga as well is rooted in Monism since the practice of a dualistic form of worship is meant to awaken in the devotee the consciousness of the identity between the subject and the object of worship. It is only when this awareness dawns that duality vanishes and with the absence of duality, a state of unity appears. The revelation of the Supreme Reality will cause unbounded love for the Lord; for to love him is to know him. It is only when devotion is inspired by knowledge and not simply by blind faith that it can be of abiding value and that it will be conducive to beneficial results.

The equal importance of action, devotion and wisdom is further substantiated by the identity of the qualities of a jñāna-yogī, bhạkti-yogī or a karma-yogī.

One is a karma-yogī when "One has conquered one's self and has attained to the calm of self-mastery, his Supreme Self abides ever concentrate, he is at peace in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain, in honour and dishonour" (VI. 7).

The jñāna-yogī is "he who is satisfied with whatever comes by chance, who has passed beyond the dualities, who is free from jealousy, who remains the same in success and failure, even when he acts, he is not bound" (IV. 22).

And, lastly the bhakta is "he who has no expectation, is pure, skilful in action, unconcerned and untroubled, who has given up all initiative and is dear to Me" (XII. 16).

The Triune Path is thus a unique, well-coordinated movement through action, devotion and knowledge that emerges into a state in which the blessed seeker realizes that the Divine is all that is. In such a blissful experience, the devotee dedicates himself body and soul to the Supreme and offers him unhesitatingly all the results of his actions in a spirit of complete renunciation, having realized the identity of the embodied self with the Self. Indifference or frustration is not to be mistaken for renunciation of such a high order. Quite to the contrary, it is a state of detachment endowed with dynamism. By the fire of divine love burning in his heart, the seeker is inspired to renounce the fruits of his actions, creating thereby the ideal conditions to concentrate exclusively on the performance of the action and not on its outcome. This freedom of mind will enable the spiritual aspirant to carry out each act with such a degree of perfection that it can only produce whole-some results. The perfection of the action coupled with the quality of the results are worthy of being offered to the Lord, the Inspirer of all actions and the Enjoyer of all results. This detached activity purifies the devotee to such an extent that he will gradually liberate himself from the pairs of opposites that enslave him to phenomenal existence. In this exalted state, the mystery of true action and divine love reveals itself in man's heart, inspiring him to surrender completly to the Lord since he sees the Lord's all-mighty will at work in each situation and not a fettered and circumscribed intention.

It is in this spirit and in this spirit only that Arjuna is enjoined to place his whole being in the Lord and to start the battle. Equal emphasis is given to fighting and remembering. Arjuna, indeed, is to be united to the Lord through his actions. He is to fight, standing on his chariot and he is to apply his art to the best of his ability, remembering constantly that it is the Lord, Kṛṣṇa, who is holding the reins and showing him the way (VIII. 7).

Seen in this light, renunciation is only another name for emancipation, the ultimate good of human existence, proclaimed since the birth of Vedic culture.

CHAPTER FIVE

The sincere and steadfast application of the precepts enunciated in the Bhagavad Gītā will, without fail, bring the summum bonum of life to a spiritual aspirant. As the embodied self, drawn by the balanced movement of karma, bhaktī and jñāna-yoga, will gradually free itself from the fetters imposed by nature, the Supreme Reality will unfold itself in an act of divine love. As the devotee renounces all the fruits of his actions and takes refuge at the feet of his Lord, he will realize that this act alone is release or emancipation. This is the solemn promise that Kṛṣṇa gives to Arjuna as early as chapter two. Still, the human disciple is to labour hard and suffer from emotional setbacks and attacks of fear and despair owing to the restlessness of his mind. His divine master recognizes this limitation and thus advises him to persevere in his efforts by constant practice and with detachment.

> "Without doubt, O Mighty-armed, the mind is difficult to curb and restless but it can be controlled, O Son of Kuntī, by constant practice and non-attachment" (VI.35).

Nevertheless, the instructions and precepts to be followed by Arjuna often strike him as baffling paradoxes since they can hardly be conceived by his limited power of understanding. It is precisely the encounter of the disciple's empirical mind with Kṛṣṇa, the beholder of supra-logical Truth, that creates these gordian knots which repeatedly obstruct the constant flow of Light to descend on him. They appear in several chapters of the Gītā and they will be loosened by Kṛṣṇa himself when he will ask Arjuna to abandon all his duties and to rest in him (XVIII.66). Even if he struggles very hard amidst conditions which, at times, can be very exacting and demanding, he will never be able to extricate himself from the bondage of duality unless he appeals directly to the Supreme.

> "But, those men of virtuous deeds in whom sin has come to an end, freed from the delusion of dualities, worship Me steadfast in their vows" (VII. 28).

Compelled by his intrinsic compassionate nature, Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme, asks his disciple to surrender completely to him when he witnesses the frustrated efforts of his beloved companion. The entire initiative comes from the Lord. He himself has cast the net of māyā, he inspires his disciple to strive for the attainment of the noble goal and he again asks his devotee to surrender to him so that he may be released from the meshes of the phenomenal order.

Surrender is thus the point of convergence of all the efforts displayed by the human disciple and the powerful current of love flowing from the divine source. It is the goal towards which the Triune Path leads the seeker. Absolute surrender perpetuates the union between the knowledge of Truth and the love for the Supreme. The state of harmony and peace thus created is the ideal coalescence of the divine and the human. Until such moment, the Truth professed by an enlightened being will always seem a paradox for the circumscribed mind of the human disciple who can only apprehend reality through the diffusing and misleading prism of duality. In the Bhagavad Gītā, this phenomenon is brought to its paroxysm when Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna—

> "The action of the three-fold modes is the subject-matter of the Veda; but do thou become free, O Arjuna, from this threefold nature; be free from the dualities, be firmly fixed in purity, not caring for acquisition and preservation, and be possessed of the Self" (II. 45).

A precept of this nature seems to be contradictory to the Vedic wisdom which had never sustained a divorce between spiritual and empirical life. Now, when Kṛṣṇa asks Arjuna to be free from acquisition and preservation, it seems that Arjuna is requested to abandon all interest for the empirical life, since in ordinary parlance, the continuation of phenomenal existence depends on the interaction of these two forces. Moreover, when Kṛṣṇa enjoins Arjuna to rest in the Self only and to experience a state of perpetual bliss, he gives the impression of overlooking the problems and difficulties of empirical existence. This, by no stretch of imagination, could be construed as the purpose behind Kṛṣṇa's words since he has continuously insisted in the performance of one's duties. Yet, the Lord promises that by adopting this attitude, Arjuna will be in a position to come to him. This is the solemn engagement the Lord takes for one who is dear to him and, besides, he declares that he himself will take full charge of all the cares and burdens of daily life provided his devotee remains aware of the perpetual and indestructible link that unites him to the Supreme. This golden tie has been existing for all times and it can never be dissolved. The devotee for his part should exert himself to remember this indissoluble connection constantly. Once he remembers this fact and discovers within the love that the Lord bears for him he in turn is prompted to reciprocate without the least hesitation. By concentrating his attention on the eternal nature of this connection and the ever flowing love of the Lord in which he is bathed the devotee will gradually detach himself from the fluctuating empirical phases of terrestrial existence and he will be released from the notions of acquisition and preservation. The wavering mind that defeats all mortal efforts at controlling it is thus required to be fixed on the Lord with the result that love for the Supreme will grow in intensity and purity. By asking Arjuna to take his mind away from the notions of acquisition and preservation, Kṛṣṇa does not drive his disciple to a total extinction of empirical life but he guides him towards genuine liberation or emancipation, since, in so doing, he sets Arjuna's mind free to move without any hindrance in the direction of the Divine. But, how does Kṛṣṇa expect Arjuna to act in such a frame of mind? This, again, confronts the seeker with a striking paradox. In several instances, Kṛṣṇa has exhorted Arjuna to comply with the injunctions of the Scriptures and to perform his duty. Yet, in the eighteenth chapter, he advisess Arjuna to abandon all his duites and to take refuge in him only.

All these apparent contradictions are to be appreciated in the light of spiritual practice. A mere intellectual rendering of the Gītā will never allow this mystery to be revealed in all its clarity. It is only by assiduous practice and sincere devotion that the core of Gītā's teachings can be touched. By constant practice and detachment, the human disciple will reach a state in which he will realize that the Lord's will is supreme. Complete surrender, therefore, is the corner-stone of the divine Poem and it is with this objective in view that Kṛṣṇa compelled Arjuna to adopt seemingly different attitudes simultaneously.

By engaging himself in action, Arjuna is to cleanse his mind of all impurities so that experience itself may teach him the way to discover the point of contact with the Divine in every action performed. Concurrently, he is asked to kindle the fire of divine love in his heart so that he may find the true inspiration to offer the fruits of his actions to the Lord and, lastly, he is to know the Lord, in and beyond himself. He is to study the field and to contact the knower of the field and therefore, he has been endowed with the ten senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego which are all emanations of Primordial Nature.

His master has given him the necessary guidance but Arjuna, in the end, is forced to admit his inability to channel all these instruments in the desired direction. Indeed, the internal sense, the mind, is almost invariably felt as being beyond any kind of control. So, the Lord asks his disciple to fix it on him. He is supremely powerful and he will see that it is completely subdued. And once the mind is mastered, the ego can no longer be active. By this act of faith, the human disciple will be able to abandon himself to the spiritual guidance surging from the depths of his being. Once he has adopted this attitude, he should no longer attach any importance to the movements of his mind and his senses and the conviction should be firmly rooted in him that anything that happens henceforward to his circumscribed self is a manifestation of the Lord's will. When the devotee has given up his ego, none remains there to feel or to judge. He does no longer virtually exist as a separate identity. It is at this stage that he becomes a bhakta. Such a one is not even interested in redemption : he simply wants to see his Lord happy. It is a forgetting of oneself in the Supreme. A bhakta has in him the content of the highest knowledge since his mind moved by the ecstasy of love assumes the shape of the Lord. It is a state of becoming one with Brahman and of being uniformly disposed towards all. It is the state of supreme wisdom that causes undying bliss.

> "Having become one with Brahman. being tranquil in spirit he neither grieves nor desires. Regarding all beings as alike he attains supreme devotion to me (XVIII. 54).

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that the word "bhakti" can be derived from either of the three roots, "bhaj", to serve, "bhañj", to break down and "bhaj", to please. Service unto the Supreme becomes a pure pleasure only when the ego has broken down. As long as the mind is allowed a free play, the identity of the self as separate from the Supreme will persist. Once the mind is allowed to rest in the Supreme, the ego ceases to play completely and all that is left is the blissful experience of the discovery of one's identification with the Supreme. This is the Vedic concept of "sāyujya", mystical participation, which is elucidated when the Lord asks Arjuna to surrender to him alone, irrespective of any duty that may await him.

Undoubtedly, the Scriptures provide duties for each of the four castes, "varṇadharma", for each of the four orders of life "āśrama-dharma" and duties common to both, "sāmānya-dharma". But, when the bhakta has taken full refuge in the Lord, it is the inner voice of intuition that speaks and the supreme duty of knowing and loving him enlightens all other activities. From that moment onwards, it is the genuineness of the devotee's love that becomes the index to the quality of his actions and to the character of his sense of duty. With a mind purified by the flame of wisdom, the devotee is inspired to abandon all expectations and desires; he is no longer disturbed by the conflicting notions of good and evil, gain and loss. The idea of acquisition and preservation has left him completely and the veil of illusion is torn once for all. He experiences the omnipotence and the omnipresence of the Supreme Reality and he abandons himself completely to it out of love. In this blissful state, the devotee realizes that the Supreme Will works always in the sense of redemption and never in that of destruction. Hence, the only redeeming attitude on the part of a human being is that of total surrender.

The Divine Dialogue is thus construed as an invaluable method of reintegration of the human element into its divine source by the constant interplay between the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Ultimate Reality. For surrender to be authentic and fruitful, there must be an Identity to whom one abandons oneself and, consequently, the abdication of the ego, which is the mainstay of the entire Poem, is vitally connected with the existence of the Supreme Being. By surrendering to this inconceivable Presence, man is released from the bonds of māyā.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa is the Transcendent and as such, he is full and perfect; but, for the purpose of evolution, he is Immanence also and the discovery of the Transcendent in Immanence is the realization of Kṛṣṇa's true nature. Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme, is the innermost essence of man's existence. As such, surrender to the Lord is not to be conceived as a surrender to any outside agency. The Vedas and the Upaniṣads have stated emphatically that the Divine is all luminosity and that the Light that shines within is also shining without. When the human being, by dint of spiritual practice, purifies himself, he will acquire his full radiance and transcend his limitations. This is the state of surrender when the human consciousness is expanded to such an extent that it can be equated to the highest state of Expanded Consciousness, the state of Brahman.

When Arjuna is asked to surrender completely to the Lord, it is to be understood that the human is to offer itself to the Divine. In that state, the human is not only taken up by the Divine but he is completely engulfed by It and the distinction between the Divine and the human ceases once for all. This state has been described by the Lord as the ultimate goal of human existence. To remain in a state of surrender is to remain in Brahman. The individual self, liberated from the bondage of māyā becomes Brahman. This sublime state, in which the awakening of human consciousness to the Transcendent Reality follows in the wake of a complete dissolution of nescience, can only happen with the descent of Divine Grace.

CONCLUSION

"Fix thy mind on Me; be devoted to Me; sacrifice to Me; prostrate thyself before Me; so shalt thou come to Me. I promise thee truly, for thou art dear to Me." (XVIII. 65)

In ultimate analysis, the Bhagavad Gītā is the call of the Supreme to the human self for the right understanding and the full realization of the purpose of his life on earth. Under any circumstance, should man ever forget that the Lord is always there to help him and to take him up ! Man's struggle is not a lonely one. The Lord is ever there waiting for his creature to return to His fold and all that is required of the human disciple is to be always mindful of this eternal connection. By fixing his mind and intellect on the Lord, by constant practice and with detachment, he will soon discover the nature of True Love that is the essence of his own being.

The Upaniṣads proclaim that it is the love of the Self that prompts the embodied self to act. Out of this deeply rooted love, all empirical movements spring forth. That being so, man can never claim that he is ignorant of the nature of Divine Love. He may have forgotten it but he can never disown it, as it is the origin of his own existence. To retrace his steps to the Source of his own being is the movement characteristic of the spiritual journey and to experience this Love in full brightness is the shining goal of the journey.

In one way or another, man has experienced love. His love may not be of the purest kind or all embracing; it is per force limited and imperfect; but, still it exists. And all that the Lord asks of a human being is to return this love in whatever form to Him. Once this movement has taken shape, the Lord assures his devotee that he will soon realize that Love is flowing incessantly from the other end and that Love is of the highest kind since it is pure and divine. The Lord is so benevolent and compassionate that He does not impose any condition on the forms of love offered unto him by his creatures. He is only eager to see devotional love flower in the heart of his disciple.

Once love is reciprocal it becomes pure and divine. The awareness of this reciprocity, of this mutual exchange is the state of Realization. As the Lord is the very essence of man's being, the Lord is the Self; and love of the Lord is nothing else than love for the Self. When this is experienced, the illsuion of duality is completely destroyed. This love is the same as pure concentration as man realizes that there is nothing outside the Self and the Self is the very foundation of his being. Then, the intellect will shine in its pristine lustre and only at that time man will feel the urge to follow the Lord and act as He wills.

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Notes 1 : The numbering of chapters and verses refers to the Bhagavad Gītā; the numbering of pages refers to the present book.

2 : The English translation of the verses is taken from "the Bhagavad Gītā" by Professor S. Radhakrishnan.

LIST OF ERRATA

Page	Line	Read	For
40	16	any other	any ther
51	4	delusion	helusion
54	20	only	on y
57	10	concludes	conlcudes
62	33	ordinary	orninary
65	20	wings	wing
67	9	aspirants	as plants
73	7	manifestations	manifestatian
80	6	on	in